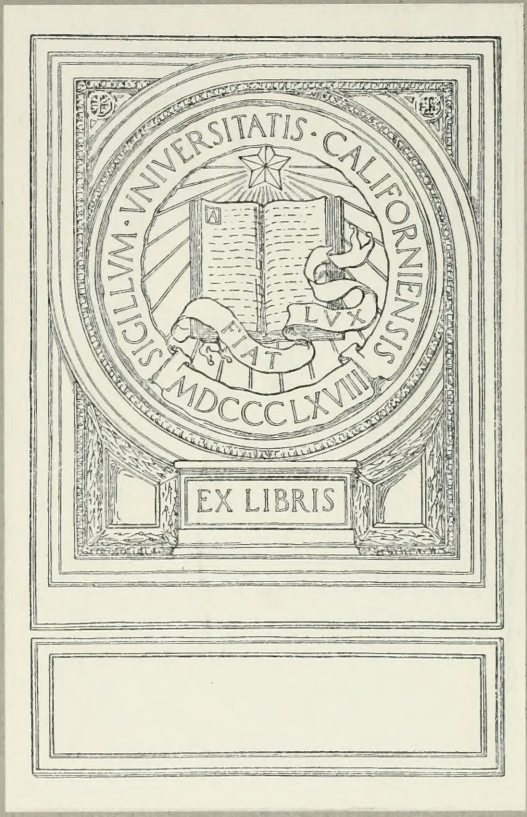
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MRS. GASKELL

HAUNTS, HOMES, AND STORIES

MRS. GASKELL
HAUNTS, HOMES,
AND STORIES

CALIFORNIA

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CALIFORNIA

Mrs Gaskell

From a drawing by George Richmond

MRS. GASKELL

HAUNTS, HOMES, AND STORIES

BY

MRS. ELLIS H. CHADWICK

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TO

MY MOTHER

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PREFACE

THIS year, being the centenary of Mrs. Gaskell's birth, presents a fitting opportunity to add something to the very inadequate information which has hitherto been published concerning the novelist and her environment.

It is a distinct loss to literature that no complete or satisfactory biography can be written. Unfortunately none of Mrs. Gaskell's letters can be published, for it was her earnest wish that they should never be made public, and her daughters, Miss Gaskell and the late Miss Julia Gaskell, who were appointed her literary executors, have always considered their mother's wish as sacred as a death-bed promise. From a perusal of some of those letters which I have been privileged to read, it is safe to say that the general impression of her noble character and gracious personality would not be materially altered. The same winsomeness shines through her letters which is to be found in her stories.

The glory of England centres very largely around its literary shrines, and although so little has been written concerning Mrs. Gaskell, and that has centred mainly around the best known shrine at Knutsford, it is evident from her growing popularity, which was perhaps never greater than it is to-day, that other places associated with the novelist will be of interest to her many devotees both in England and America.

PREFACE

Having spent the greater part of my life in the Gaskell country, and having discussed the novelist and her stories with those who knew her intimately, I have attempted to trace her scenes and characters to their originals, and wherever possible have let Mrs. Gaskell give her own descriptions and tell her own life story.

In giving expression of my thanks to those who have assisted me, I feel that the list would be extremely long, and if any to whom I am indebted fail to find my acknowledgment of their kindness, I hope they will accept the limitations of space as my only reason for omitting to mention them individually. My thanks are due especially to Mr. J. A. Green, of Manchester, Mr. Richard Welford, M.A., of Newcastle-on-Tyne; Mr. J. Henry Quinn, of Chelsea; Mr. Salt-Brassington and Mr. Richard Savage, of Stratford-on-Avon; Mrs. Hodgson, of Clopton House; Mrs. Frank Merriman, of Knutsford; and Miss Sanders, of Whitby. I am also indebted to Mrs. Hedley for a photograph of Briery Close as it was when Mrs. Gaskell stayed there; and to the following for permission to copy photographs which deal with the period covered by Mrs. Gaskell's stories: Mr. J. J. Stead, Mr. A. H. Worthington, the Trustees of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, the Trustees and Guardians of Shakespeare's Birthplace, the Committee of the Moss Side Public Library, and the Committee of the Chelsea Public Library.

ESTHER ALICE CHADWICK.

ENFIELD,
MIDDLESEX.

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Mrs. Gaskell: Haunts, Homes and Stories

CHAPTER I

BIRTH, PARENTAGE, AND ANCESTRY

ELIZABETH Cleghorn Stevenson, a Londoner by Birth—James Cleghorn—The Stevensons of Norwegian Descent—Love of the Sea—Rev. Joseph Stevenson, S.J.—The Novelist's Father, William Stevenson—His Literary Tastes—Retires from the Ministry—Scientific Farming—He Settles in Edinburgh—Contributes to Magazines—Editor of the *Scots Magazine*—Sir Henry Holland—William Stevenson appointed Keeper to the Treasury Records—His Marriage—The Novelist's Mother—The Hollands of Sandlebridge—Some of Mrs. Gaskell's Relatives.

"THOUGH a Londoner by birth, I was early motherless, and taken when only a year old to my dear *adopted native* town, Knutsford," wrote Mrs. Gaskell in 1838. She was always proud of being a native of the Metropolis, although she only lived there for a very short time after her birth in 1810, and for a period of two years before her father died in 1829.

Mrs. Gaskell was born in Chelsea, in a house in Lindsey Row, now a part of Cheyne Walk, on the banks of the Thames opposite Battersea Bridge. Here Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson—to give her full maiden name—first saw the light on Michaelmas Day, September 29th, 1810.

She was the second child of William Stevenson by his first marriage. Her mother was Elizabeth Holland, daughter of Samuel Holland, farmer and land agent

of Sandlebridge, Cheshire. At the time of his daughter's birth, William Stevenson was the keeper of the Records at the Treasury Office.

Mrs. Gaskell received her first name from her mother, who died soon after the birth of her daughter, and her second name was probably on account of the close friendship existing between William Stevenson and James Cleghorn of Dunse, in Berwickshire. It was James Cleghorn who fostered Stevenson's love of agriculture, for he was a farmer who worked on scientific lines, and, like William Stevenson, wrote articles based on his own practical experience for the agricultural magazines.

James Cleghorn contributed to the *Scots Magazine*, of which William Stevenson was editor, and in 1811 he became editor of *The Farmer's Journal*. The article on agriculture, in the seventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, was written by him.

According to tradition, the Stevensons were of Norwegian descent and in some of the family papers the name is spelt Stevensen. Mrs. Gaskell's father, in many ways a remarkable man, belonged to a distinguished Border family. He was born at Berwick-on-Tweed on November 26th, 1772. His father was a captain in the Royal Navy, and one of his brothers also became a sailor, whilst in later days his son John, born some little time before his daughter Elizabeth, showed the strong inclination for the sea which characterised the Stevenson family, and became a lieutenant in the Merchant Service. In 1827 he mysteriously disappeared at sea, but he is held in remembrance in Mrs. Gaskell's stories as Poor Peter in *Cranford* and Master Frederick in *North and South*, and he probably suggested the strange article on *Disappearances*, which she wrote in 1851 for *Household Words*.

A nephew of William Stevenson, Father Joseph Stevenson, S.J., was the distinguished historian and archivist. He was the son of Robert Stevenson, of Berwick-on-Tweed. After attending a school at Durham, he entered the Glasgow University and determined to enter the Presbyterian ministry, but turned aside to antiquarian and literary pursuits. Then, after holding appointments connected with the keeping of the Public Records, he joined the Church of England, and entered Durham University to prepare himself for the ministry. Some years later, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. In 1872 he obtained a pension for his historical researches. He died in 1895, and was buried at St. Thomas' Church, Fulham. As a writer, his historical research, like that of his uncle, William Stevenson, was characterised by the amount of industry which it revealed, and the authentic information which he collected was a valuable addition to English literature.

William Stevenson's mother was Isabella Thomson, who was second cousin to the well-known author of *The Seasons*. Thus Mrs. Gaskell could claim kindred on her father's side with writers and *littérateurs*, and, if heredity is to count for anything, her father was responsible for her love of historical research, which is revealed in many of her stories.

In his early days, William Stevenson was a pupil at the local Grammar School at Berwick-on-Tweed under Joseph Romney. He was not noted as a boy for his love of study, for in a letter to Captain Stevenson, whose ship was stationed near Cork, his mother writes :

" The children are all very well and give me no trouble, except William, who hardly ever attends school, and is constantly running about the walls."

But, as he grew older, William developed a love of

learning, which he retained all through his subsequent life; whilst at college he preferred books to sports, and his favourite recreation was walking. This he kept up in his Chelsea days, enjoying the walk from Lindsey Row to the Treasury Office and back each day.

Towards the end of his schooldays at Berwick-on-Tweed, he showed no particular bent, but his love of study prompted his father to give him a classical and theological training, to prepare him for the Unitarian ministry. With this in view, he entered the Daventry Academy in 1787. This college was transferred to Northampton in 1789, and here William Stevenson stayed until he had completed his education. He was recognised at this time as an industrious student and a keen debater in classics and theology.

He was now qualified as a Unitarian minister, but with a view to increasing his knowledge, he went to Belgium, and before he attained his twentieth birthday obtained an appointment at Bruges as private tutor in an English family. Whilst at Bruges he became interested in the pioneer of printing in this country and, later, he wrote a short life of Caxton.

The outbreak of war in 1792 caused his return to England, after holding his tutorship for only a few months. Very shortly afterwards he was appointed minister at Dob Lane Unitarian Chapel, Failsworth, near Manchester, and he also became classical tutor in the Manchester Academy—a well-known educational institution at that period. Thus, like many Unitarian ministers of those days, he held two appointments, preaching on Sundays and teaching during the week.

Manchester, however, did not retain his services long. Whilst there, he was greatly influenced by Thomas Barnes, a Doctor of Divinity of Edinburgh

University, who had received his early education from Philip Holland, a noted schoolmaster of Bolton, and a relative of the Hollands of Sandlebridge. Dr. Barnes was the minister at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester, where afterwards Mrs. Gaskell's husband was a minister for fifty-six years. It was Dr. Barnes who, with Dr. Percival and Mr. Henry, founded the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester in 1781. This was the first society of the kind in England.

William Stevenson afterwards developed conscientious scruples against being a hired minister, with the result that he resigned his preaching appointment. This doubtless suggested to Mrs. Gaskell the character of Mr. Hale, the clergyman in *North and South*, who resigned his living for conscientious reasons, and became tutor in smoky Milton, which has long been recognised as Manchester.

"When thou canst no longer continue in thy work without dishonour to God, discredit to religion, foregoing thy integrity, wounding conscience, spoiling thy peace, and hazarding the loss of thy salvation; in a word, when the conditions upon which thou must continue (if thou wilt continue) in thy employments are sinful and unwarranted by the word of God, thou mayest, yea, thou must believe that God will turn thy very silence, suspension, deprivation, and laying aside, to His glory, and the advancement of the Gospel's interest. When God will not use thee in one kind, yet He will in another. A soul that desires to serve and honour Him shall never want opportunity to do it, nor must thou so limit the Holy One of Israel, as to think He hath but one way in which He can glorify Himself by thee. He can do it by thy silence as well as by thy preaching; thy laying aside as well as thy continuance in thy work. It is

not pretence of doing God the greatest service, or performing the weightiest duty, that will excuse the least sin, though that sin capacitated or gave us the opportunity for doing that duty. Thou wilt have little thanks, O my soul! if when thou art charged with corrupting God's worship, falsifying thy vows, thou pretendest a necessity for it in order to a continuance in the ministry."

These lines were read out to Margaret by Mr. Hale in justification of his resolve to give up his living as Vicar of Helstone; they are a quotation from an old book in the clergyman's library.

In 1797, Mr. Stevenson left Manchester and turned his attention to farming, for which he had a liking, going to East Lothian as an agricultural pupil. Very probably he was attracted to this district because at that time East Lothian was in the van of agricultural progress, and experiments were being made on scientific lines. His friend, James Cleghorn, was keenly interested in agricultural reform, and just about this time the first chair of agriculture in Great Britain was founded at Edinburgh University. When his education in agriculture was sufficiently advanced, Mr. Stevenson rented a small farm at Laughton, near Edinburgh, and worked it by scientific methods.

In *My French Master*—one of Mrs. Gaskell's short stories—she tells of the amateur scientific farmer who lost more than he gained "over the very small scale of his operations," and of the mother calculating: "If on twelve acres he managed to lose a hundred pounds a year, what would be our loss on a hundred and fifty?"

For four years Mr. Stevenson had to suffer reverses, some of which were beyond his control. There was a succession of bad harvests, and a fear of foreign invasion led to a panic and a run on the banks. This

affected every branch of industry, and especially agriculture.

Therefore, in 1801, Mr. Stevenson gave up his little farm and went to live in Edinburgh, where he established a boarding house for University students in Drummond Street, at the same time acting as a "private coach" at the University. In order to supplement his income, he contributed to the *Edinburgh Review*, and in 1803 this versatile farmer-teacher became editor of the *Scots Magazine*.

Literature now claimed a good part of Mr. Stevenson's time and talents, and for the next few years his articles on agriculture and other subjects were much appreciated. " He laboured with unremitting diligence, contributing to the *Westminster Retrospective, Oxford Review* and the *Edinburgh Review*, and also to the *Foreign Reviews*." As " private-coach," journalist, and editor, his life was one of incessant toil, but Edinburgh did much to foster his love of research, besides bringing him in contact with the cultured life of the University.

Four years after William Stevenson settled in Edinburgh, a young student from Cheshire, Henry Holland (afterwards the famous Sir Henry Holland, physician to Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort), a son of Peter Holland, the genial surgeon of Knutsford, " who had his round of thirty miles and slept at Cranford," came to Edinburgh as a medical student. He had previously studied at Glasgow University for two years, though not in medicine, and had been for a few months in a commercial house in Liverpool. Though only a youth of eighteen, he had already distinguished himself by drawing up a Survey of Cheshire for the Board of Agriculture, for which he was offered one hundred pounds if it proved satisfactory ; so well was his task accomplished, that the Board paid him

two hundred pounds, "for it was full of sound and well-prepared material," wrote his father in 1806, to Josiah Wedgwood. Whether young Holland had met Mr. Stevenson, who was a tutor in Manchester, some ten years previously is doubtful, but it is very probable that some members of the Holland family had known Stevenson in Manchester. The two men were mutually attracted to each other; both had been brought up in the Unitarian faith, and both were interested in the cultivation of the land and in surveying. It is probable that this friendship between them led to Mr. Stevenson meeting his future wife, Elizabeth Holland, the mother of the novelist.

The love story is suggested in *Cousin Phillis*. This is not all true to fact, but there is sufficient to show where Mrs. Gaskell found her originals, although the story centres around the construction of the railway to Knutsford, which was opened in the year 1862.

The narrator of the story, Paul Manning, takes Mr. Holdsworth, "who had been such a great traveller," to Heathbridge, which, from Mrs. Gaskell's description, is easily identified as Sandlebridge, the home in which Mrs. Gaskell's mother was reared, and of which Sir Henry Holland, in his *Recollections*, writes: "My cousin, Mrs. Gaskell, who knew Sandlebridge well, has pictured the place by some short, but very descriptive touches in one or two of her novels." The two novels are *Cranford*, where Sandlebridge is known as Woodley, and *Cousin Phillis*, where it figures as Hope Farm, Heathbridge.

Knowing that all Mrs. Gaskell's novels are founded on fact, and that, except in *Sylvia's Lovers*, those facts came out of her own life, or the lives of her relatives and friends, we can see a striking parallel between Mrs. Gaskell's cousin, Henry Holland, taking Mr.

Stevenson to his grandfather's farm at Sandlebridge, with "his theodolite and other surveying instruments," and Paul Manning taking Mr. Holdsworth to Hope Farm.

Mr. Holdsworth, like Mr. Stevenson, was acquainted with Horace and Virgil, "making them living instead of dead" to Farmer Holman, who compared his own "relish for Holdsworth's intellectual conversation" to dram-drinking. "'I listen to him till I forget my duties and am carried off my feet.'" Holdsworth still further won the old farmer's heart by his "practical art of surveying and taking a level."

The tale of *Cousin Phillis* shows that Mr. Holdsworth was received at Hope Farm with some diffidence, for when Paul asks the farmer if he likes Holdsworth, the reply is: "'Yes! I like him!'" weighing his words a little as he spoke. "'I like him. I hope I am justified in doing it, but he takes hold of me, as it were; and I have almost been afraid lest he carries me away, in spite of my judgment.'"

Smith's *Treatise on Cheshire*, commenting on the people of this county, says:

"They are ready to resist the enemy or stranger that shall invade their county, the very name whereof they cannot abide."

This, says Smith, specially applied to the Scots. The antipathy to a Scot survived as a Cheshire characteristic to comparatively recent times, and there is a case on record where an estate was left to a daughter, with the understanding that she should be disinherited if she married a native of Scotland or one born of Scottish parents. The prohibited event took place. "Eve would have her apple, though it lost Eden."

Mrs. Gaskell in *Cousin Phillis* points to this trait in the people's character when Paul, referring to

the meeting between Farmer Holman and Mr. Holdsworth, says :

" 'Men have always a little natural antipathy to get over when they first meet as strangers. But in this case each was disposed to make an effort to like the other ; only each was to each a specimen of an unknown class.' "

There would, doubtless, be a certain amount of prejudice to be overcome by Samuel Holland, the Cheshire farmer, and William Stevenson, the Scottish editor and University " coach," who was a native of the Border town of Berwick-on-Tweed, and whose mother was a Scot. Mr. Holdsworth's superior learning and intellectual conversation, together with his " foreign manners," captivated the simple country girl at Hope Farm. What a beautiful portrait of maidenhood Mrs. Gaskell has drawn in *Cousin Phillis*, and if she meant it for her own mother, what a tribute of love she gave to her whom she never knew.

" I see her now—Cousin Phillis. The westering sun shone full upon her, and made a slanting stream of light into the room within. She was dressed in dark blue cotton of some kind ; up to her throat, down to her wrists, with a little frill of the same wherever it touched her white skin. And such a white skin as it was ! I have never seen the like. She had light hair, nearer yellow than any other colour. She looked me steadily in the face with large, quiet eyes, wondering, but untroubled by the sight of a stranger."

Towards the end of 1806, James Maitland, the eighth Earl of Lauderdale, was offered by Fox the position of Governor-General of India, and he, having a very high opinion of William Stevenson's abilities, offered him the post of private secretary.

Just as Mr. Holdsworth, having given up his position, said to Paul Manning on receiving a letter

from Mr. Greathed, "'He wants to see me about some business; in fact, I may as well tell you, Paul, this letter contains a very advantageous proposal,'" so Mr. Stevenson, using Paul Manning's words, may have said to young Holland, "'I will go to-night. Activity and readiness go a long way in our profession. Remember that, my boy! I hope I shall come back; but if I don't, be sure and recollect all the words of wisdom that have fallen from my lips. . . .'"

"'Then you don't think you will come back?'"

"'I will come back some time, never fear,'" said he kindly.

"'I may be back in a couple of days, having been found incompetent for the work; or I may not be wanted to go out as soon as I now anticipate.'"

The sudden call to London causes Holdsworth to betray his love for Phillis to Paul Manning.

"'Love her!—Yes, that I do. Who could help it, seeing her as I have done? Her character as unusual and rare as her beauty. God bless her! God keep her in her high tranquillity, her pure innocence. Two years! It is a long time. But she lives in such seclusion, almost like the sleeping beauty, Paul; but I shall come back like a prince and waken her to my love. I can't help hoping that it won't be difficult, eh, Paul?'"

Mr. Stevenson was only making a precarious living in Edinburgh; he was known to be careless about money matters, and his boarding-house, like his farming, was not very remunerative. Writing and coaching did not add greatly to his income, hence his eagerness to accept Lord Lauderdale's offer.

"'You see, the salary they offer me is large; and, beside that, this experience will give me a name, which will entitle me to expect a still larger in any future undertaking.'"

"'That won't influence Phillis.'"

"'No; but it will make me more eligible in the eyes of her father and mother.'"

"'You give me your best wishes, Paul,' said he, almost pleading. 'You would like me for a cousin?'"

The end of the story of *Cousin Phillis* is disappointing, but in real life William Stevenson married Elizabeth Holland shortly after this offer from Lord Lauderdale, and Henry Holland became Mr. Stevenson's nephew.

Much to the disappointment of William Stevenson, the East India Company strenuously opposed Lord Lauderdale's appointment as Governor-General, and in consequence, he withdrew from the position; but as Mr. Stevenson had given up his Edinburgh work for the post of private secretary to Lord Lauderdale, and had come to London to help in the preparations for India, the Earl felt compelled to compensate him, and as there was a vacancy at the Treasury Office, he used his influence and secured for him the position of keeper of the Treasury Records.

Evidently Mr. Stevenson's work at Edinburgh was greatly appreciated, for, shortly after this, he was offered by the Czar of Russia a professorship of technology at Karkhov University. The offer is said to have been made in most flattering language, but Stevenson declined and settled in London, living first at Mayfair and afterwards at Lindsey Row, where his famous daughter was born.

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson's mother was Elizabeth, daughter of Samuel Holland, of Sandlebridge, and grand-daughter of John Holland, of Dam Head, Mobberley, Cheshire, the head of the Cheshire branch of the well-known Lancashire family.

Samuel Holland was a very original character, and

many of his quaint remarks are to be found in *Cousin Phillis*. Sir Henry Holland, in his *Recollections of My Past Life*, says: "My grandfather (Samuel Holland) was the most perfect practical optimist I have ever known. He could never be got to complain of the change or distemperature of the seasons."

Elizabeth Stevenson's mother came from a truly religious home, and Ebenezer Holman fits her father's character as a good type of the best Dissenters of that day, who believed in the Bible as the one guide for everything, even to the deciding of the children's names.

Most of Samuel Holland's large family rejoiced in Biblical names, which included Samuel, Peter, and Thomas for his sons, and Mary, Hannah, Elizabeth, and Abigail for his daughters. Mrs. Gaskell's maternal grandmother was Ann Swinton (a name still kept in the Holland family), a descendant of John Swinton, of Nether Knutsford, who is mentioned in the history of Cheshire as one of the two charterers who owned Over Peover, near Knutsford, in 1666.

Sandlebridge Farm came into the possession of the Holland family through Mary Colthurst, who was the sole heiress to the property, which had been owned by her family since 1650, according to the history of Cheshire. Mary Colthurst married John Holland in 1718. The Cheshire branch was related to the Lancashire Hollands, one of whom, Jane, daughter of Edward Holland, married Thomas Cholmondeley, the son of Robert, Earl of Leinster, who died in 1667. Thus the maternal relatives of Elizabeth Stevenson have long held an honoured name in Lancashire and Cheshire.

Of the children reared in the Sandlebridge home, the best known was Peter Holland, whose reputation spread beyond the country town of Knutsford, and who left behind him letters, which show

"a refinement and cultivation not common to country surgeons of his time."

Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell became the most widely known of the descendants of the Hollands.

The most distinguished living representative of the Holland family is the present Lord Knutsford, Henry Thurstan Holland, a great-grandson of Samuel Holland, whose father, Sir Henry Holland, was first cousin to Mrs. Gaskell.

Through her mother's brother, Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was related to the Wedgwoods and the Darwins, as well as the Turners of Newcastle-on-Tyne and the Willets of Newcastle-under-Lyne.

Mrs. Gaskell's aunt, the first wife of Dr. Peter Holland, was a niece of Josiah Wedgwood, her mother being sister to the famous inventor of the pottery which bears his name. Another sister of Josiah Wedgwood was the mother of the well-known naturalist, Charles Darwin, who enjoyed having a good novel read to him as a recreation, and is said to have blessed all novelists. He took a great interest in Mrs. Gaskell's novels when they were first issued, and was concerned to find himself portrayed in her last and best book, *Wives and Daughters*. It is not generally known that Darwin was the model for Roger Hamley in *Wives and Daughters*. To read the early life of Darwin at Cambridge and his voyage in the *Beagle*, leads one to recognise where Mrs. Gaskell looked for her original in depicting Roger Hamley. Charles Darwin married his cousin, Emma Wedgwood, whom Mrs. Gaskell knew, though she is not the prototype of Molly Gibson.

All these families—the Hollands, Wedgwoods, and the Darwins—were Unitarians, and they were all keen educationists, taking an intelligent interest in the training of their children.

The history of the different families reveals the beautiful religious spirit that pervaded their respective homes.

Another family with whom the Hollands were connected was the Turners, who gave several noted ministers for four generations to the Unitarian ministry. Mr. Turner, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, married Mary, daughter of Thomas Holland, for his first wife, and Jane Willet, a niece of Josiah Wedgwood, for his second. The Willets were another well-known Unitarian family.

CHAPTER II

CHELSEA

LINDSEY ROW, Chelsea—Belle Vue Lodge—Death of Mrs. Stevenson—Elizabeth Stevenson's Journey to Knutsford—Influence of Heredity.

No more interesting place could have been found than historic and literary Chelsea for the birthplace of a future novelist and biographer, for there is no spot in England which can lay claim to have been the home of so many great thinkers, writers, and artists as the old-world "little village of palaces." The very word Chelsea is redolent of literature and art, and suggests the names of many who are enrolled on the scroll of fame: Sir Thomas More, Sir Hans Sloane, Carlyle, Rossetti, Kingsley, Maclise, Turner, Whistler, Leigh Hunt, and other lesser lights. Amongst the distinguished women who have lived in Chelsea are George Eliot, Mary Mitford, Mrs. Carlyle, Mary Somerville, and Mary Astell, a pioneer of the Women's Rights movements. These and others have all combined to make Chelsea one of the great literary shrines to which pilgrims from all parts of the world come to pay homage. But in no list of Chelsea writers is Mrs. Gaskell's name to be found, and there are few people outside her own family circle who know the house in which she was born. Whilst many of the London houses in which distinguished people have lived have a tablet bearing the name and date of occupancy, there is nothing to distinguish the house associated with Mrs. Gaskell's birth. This is probably because so little is known of her early life.

From a drawing by W. W. Burgess, in the Chelsea Public Library

OLD LINDSEY ROW

The house in which she was born is now 93, Cheyne Walk. At one time it was known as 1, Belle Vue, but in 1810, when Mrs. Gaskell was born there, it was 12, Lindsey Row. It commands a fine view of the river and Battersea Bridge.

Lindsey Row was formed by two blocks of houses, which at one time consisted of two large detached mansions, one being called Lindsey House and the other Belle Vue Lodge.

There is sufficient history associated with Lindsey Row to fill a volume. The larger house was built originally by Sir Theodore de Mayerne, who is said to have been physician to four kings—two English and two French. The house was afterwards bought and rebuilt by Robert, Earl of Lindsey, about 1668 A.D. Hence the name.

In 1751, Count Zinzendorf purchased it for the Moravian Society, and came to reside in the house. He afterwards built a Moravian Chapel, and added a burial ground at the back, on the site of the old garden of Beaufort House—another historic mansion in the immediate neighbourhood. Failing to establish a colony, the Moravians, in 1770, sold the house and it was subsequently divided into five tenements. Jennings, the famous collector, lived in one of these at the time of Elizabeth Stevenson's birth.

In another lived Joseph Bramah, the inventor of the lock which bears his name. John Martin, the painter, resided here in 1848, and there he was honoured by visits from the Prince Consort. In later days, Whistler, the painter, who perpetuated so many characteristic scenes of the riverside at Chelsea, lived in Lindsey Row.

Belle Vue Lodge, which formed part of Lindsey Row, was much smaller than Lindsey House. It was built in 1771 by the father of Charles Hachette, the

well-known art collector, just after Lindsey House was divided into tenements. At a later date, Belle Vue Lodge was divided into three houses, varying in size, the middle house being much smaller than the other two.

It was in this house that Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was born. It is a four-storied, red brick building, with small windows looking out over the Thames. It is said that she was born in the front bedroom on the second floor. Underneath this was the drawing-room, and on the ground floor were two small rooms. The front room was probably used as a dining-room, and the other would be convenient as a study for Mr. Stevenson. The front of the house and windows have been modernised, but otherwise the rooms are practically the same as they were in the days when the Stevensons lived there. After the roomy country house at Sandlebridge, this house, with its small rooms and no garden, would be a great contrast for Mrs. Stevenson.

Chelsea at this time was not part of London, and both rent and rates were very much lower than they are now, even allowing for the greater purchasing value of money at that time. William Stevenson's house was rated at twenty pounds per annum.

In the Stevensons' days, there were private gardens across the road, which several of the tenants rented, but Mr. Stevenson does not appear to have had one included with his house. There are still a few trees in front of the house, but the greater part of these gardens has been included in the Embankment. The large weeping willow, which was planted in 1776, once a feature of these gardens, has gone.

Here, from the fifteenth century, and possibly earlier, was the old ferry, replaced afterwards by the quaint wooden Battersea Bridge, beloved by artists,

MRS. GASKELL'S BIRTH-PLACE

and familiar through the beautiful paintings by Turner, De Wint, and Whistler. It was just beyond this picturesque bend of the river that Turner came to live in a house which commanded a view of the setting sun towards the Surrey Hills, and gave him solace in his last lonely days.

Chelsea! What memories it would bring to Mrs. Gaskell when, in after years, she went to visit Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle at their home in Cheyne Row, which is some little distance from the Embankment, and must not be confused with Cheyne Walk. Mrs. Gaskell was born in a distinguished place and at an opportune time, the beginning of the nineteenth century, when so many eminent men and women came into the world. Yet how seldom is her name included in the list of distinguished people, whose centenaries, in some cases, have aroused such enthusiasm.

When the centenary of Richmond, the great portrait painter of the Victorian era, was commemorated in March, 1909, a list was given of the distinguished people whose portraits he had painted, and also of those with whom he had been most successful, but in neither list did Mrs. Gaskell's name appear, although her portrait was one of his triumphs.

To be born in Royal Chelsea was to be "a native of no mean city," and Mrs. Gaskell was always proud of her birthplace.

It was, as already stated, at the end of September, 1810, that Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson was born, and shortly afterwards her mother died. There was an elder child, John Stevenson, who afterwards became a sailor.

In one of her stories, Mrs. Gaskell writes: "My mother began to sink the day after I was born. My father sent to Carlisle [London] for doctors, and

would have coined his heart's blood into gold to save her, if that could have been ; but it could not.

" My aunt Fanny used to say sometimes that she thought that Helen did not wish to live, and so just let herself die away without trying to take hold on life ; but, when I questioned her, she owned that my mother did all the doctors bade her do, with the same sort of uncomplaining patience with which she had acted through life. One of her last requests was to have Gregory laid in her bed by my side, and then she made him take hold of my little hand. Her husband came in while she was looking at us so ; and, when he bent tenderly over her to ask her how she felt now, and seemed to gaze on us two . . . with a grave sort of kindliness, she looked up in his face and smiled . . . and such a sweet smile ! . . . In an hour she was dead. . . .

" My father would have been glad to return to his old mode of bachelor life, but what could he do with two little children ? He needed a woman to take care of him, and who so fitting as his wife's elder sister ? So she had the charge of me from my birth ; and for a time I was weakly, as was but natural, and she was always beside me, night and day, watching over me, and my father nearly as anxious as she. . . .

" He needed something to love . . . and he took to me as, I fancy, he had taken to no human being before. . . . I loved him back again right heartily. I loved all around me, I believe, for everybody was kind to me. After a time, I overcame my original weakliness of constitution, and was just a bonny, strong-looking lad, whom every passer-by noticed when my father took me with him to the nearest town.

" At home, I was the darling of my aunt, the tenderly-beloved of my father, the pet and plaything of the old domestics, the ' young master ' of the

farm-labourers, before whom I played many a lordly antic, assuming a sort of authority which sat oddly enough, I doubt not, on such a baby as I was.

"Gregory was three years older than I. Aunt Fanny was always kind to him in deed and in action, but she did not often think about him ; she had fallen so completely into the habit of being engrossed by me, from the fact of my having come into her charge as a delicate baby."

This all fits in with the few facts that are known of Elizabeth Stevenson's birth, the death of her mother, and her adoption by her mother's sister, who was two years older than Mrs. Stevenson. Gregory is the prototype of her brother, John Stevenson, and the baby, who figures as a boy in the story, is evidently intended for the novelist herself.

The father, sorrowing for the loss of his wife, and hardly knowing what was best to do, got a sympathetic neighbouring shopkeeper's wife to take charge of his baby daughter until he could make further arrangements. Afterwards, his sister-in-law, Mrs. Lumb, of Knutsford, offered to take her sister's baby and bring her up with her own little daughter, who was very delicate and a cripple. This aunt had a sad life. She married a Mr. Lumb, of Wakefield, and after her marriage discovered that her husband was insane, and she was obliged to live away from him. Returning to Sandlebridge for a time, she afterwards took the substantial house on the heath side of Knutsford, to which Elizabeth Stevenson was taken, and where she spent the first fifteen years of her life.

In adopting her niece, Mrs. Lumb cherished the hope that the baby would grow up to be a companion to her afflicted child, and would help to soothe the disappointment of her own married life. Thus, from

the first, the little Elizabeth's mission seems to have been to comfort and help those with whom she came in contact. Her cousin, the little cripple died, and the aunt was greatly comforted by having her sister's child to take the place of her own daughter, and thus she became a second mother to the future novelist.

A journey from London to Knutsford in the early part of the nineteenth century was considered a great undertaking, and the difficulty of getting the young baby by stage-coach to her aunt's home, in the month of November, when the days were short and the travelling slow, was a problem that faced the bereaved husband. However, a friend of the family, a Mrs. Whittington, offered to take charge of the little child and see her safely to Knutsford. Mrs. Lumb had her own delicate little girl to tend, or she would probably have paid a visit to Chelsea in order to fetch her niece.

This journey is said to have suggested the incident in *Mary Barton*, where the two grandfathers brought their motherless grand-daughter from London to Manchester by stage-coach. Whether this is so or not, the parallel is striking, and Mrs. Gaskell has given the details of the journey as only a mother, who had known the claims of a little one left motherless, could. In after years, children, especially babies, always found a warm place in Mrs. Gaskell's heart, and she had ever a special solicitude for the bairns who had no mother, whatever their station in life might be.

To those who are familiar with the Lancashire dialect, as spoken by the working classes in Manchester, how natural and pathetic the story of the "babby's" journey with her grandfathers reads, as told by Job Leigh to Mary Barton! He is retailing his experience of bringing his baby grand-daughter

from London to Manchester in company with the paternal grandfather of the helpless orphan child.

" 'We'd the stout little babby to bring home. We'd not overmuch money left ; but it were fine weather, and we thought we'd take th' coach to Brummagem, and walk on. . . . The babby had been fed afore we set out, and th' coach moving kept it asleep, bless its little heart ! But when th' coach stopped for dinner it were awake, and crying for its pobbies. . . .

" 'My heart ached for th' little thing. It caught wi' its wee mouth at our coat sleeves and at our mouths. . . . Poor little wench ! it wanted its mammy, as were lying cold in th' grave.' "

The story of Elizabeth Stevenson's journey from London to Knutsford would be told to her in later life by her aunt, and this so impressed itself on her memory, that it became an incident in the book which made her name.

In later life, Mrs. Gaskell was wont to refer to herself as " a born traveller," and, like Ruskin, she had a lingering regret for the passing away of the stage-coach. Driving was always more congenial to her than a railway journey. It soothed her nerves and tended to stimulate thought. She was always glad to accompany her husband when he drove to different places in connection with his preaching engagements ; and, when a little girl at Knutsford, she loved to drive in the dog-cart with her uncle, Dr. Peter Holland, when on his rounds.

In the autumn of 1865, a little while before her death, Mrs. Gaskell had planned a long driving tour through certain country districts of England, from Manchester to her last home at Holybourne. Relays of horses were to be ready at fixed places *en route*, but for some reason that tour was never made, although it had long been talked of. Her last ride

from her home in Manchester to her new home in Hampshire was made by rail.

Mr. Stevenson, in the spring of 1811, left his house in Lindsey Row with its sad memories, and removed to a house just round the corner in Beaufort Row, now called Beaufort Street, the site of which had at one time been the garden to Beaufort House, another Chelsea mansion, with an interesting history.

Mr. Stevenson lived at No. 3, Beaufort Row, with his son and a housekeeper until 1814, when he married again. His second wife was Catherine, daughter of Alexander Thomson, postmaster of Savannah, Georgia.

If heredity is to count for anything, Mrs. Gaskell owed much of her literary ability to her father, for, in addition to his work as editor of the *Scots Magazine* and frequent contributions to the *Edinburgh Review* and *The Retrospective Review*, he published *Remarks on the very Inferior Utility of Classical Learning, A System of Land Surveying, 1805 and 1810, General View of the Agriculture of Surrey, 1809, General View of the Agriculture of Dorset, 1812, Historical Sketch of Discovery, Navigation, and Commerce, 1824.* He also contributed an article on Chivalry to *Dr. Brewster's Edinburgh Encyclopædia* and wrote the Life of Caxton, in addition to other treatises, for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. For several years, too, he compiled the greater part of the *Annual Register*. *Longman's Obituary for 1830* stated: "The literary and scientific world has sustained a great loss in the death of Mr. Stevenson, a man remarkable for the stores of knowledge which he possessed, and for the simplicity and modesty by which his rare attainments were concealed. . . . William Stevenson had the true spirit of a faithful historian, and, contrary to the practice too prevalent in those days, dived into original sources of information."

In later years his daughter Elizabeth was noted for this same "true spirit," and no trouble was considered too great in order to obtain accurate and authentic information. A letter before the writer, addressed to a high authority on the subject of her quest, shows her anxiety to be absolutely sure of her facts before committing them to paper. Mrs. Gaskell much enjoyed diving into "original sources of information," and the harder the hunt for her particular point, the more she enjoyed tracing it to its source. Nothing daunted her, and she had a genius for eliciting information from what would seem to be unlikely sources. The intellectual side of her character was certainly inherited from her father, and her genius as a housekeeper, cook, and general home manager, proved her to be a worthy daughter of her mother, who had received an excellent domestic training in her home at Sandlebridge. One of Mrs. Gaskell's daughters said that her mother was the best housekeeper and cook she had ever known, and those who knew the novelist in her Manchester days confirm this.

Some of Mrs. Gaskell's admirers have claimed that characters and scenes in her novels and stories were all the creation of her brilliant imagination. It has been considered derogatory to her ability to suggest that Cranford and Knutsford are synonymous, and that Miss Jenkyns was Miss Holland. In this connection, one of Mrs. Gaskell's daughters wrote to Edna Lyall, saying:

"My mother never meant to put real people into her stories, but even her children would sometimes recognise the characters, and say, 'Oh! so-and-so is just like Mr. Blank,' and she would reply, 'So he is, but I never meant it for him.'"

Those who knew something of Mrs. Gaskell's relatives and friends found it easy to recognise certain

characters and places in her stories. These may have suggested themselves unconsciously to Mrs. Gaskell, who nevertheless painted them in such colours as to make them easily recognisable. The fact that some of her relatives were very original and somewhat eccentric has given additional interest to her stories.

But, as Charlotte Brontë said of *Shirley*, "You are not to suppose that any of the characters are intended as literary portraits. It would not suit the rules of art, nor of my own feelings. . . . We only suffer reality to *suggest* never to *dictate*. The heroines are abstractions, and the heroes also. Qualities I have seen, loved, and admired, are here and there put in as decorative gems, to be preserved in that setting."

So it was with Mrs. Gaskell, though in some cases, the characters portrayed the originals so well, that they were easily recognised. Some of her own relatives at Knutsford and elsewhere were not so well pleased with some of her stories for that reason; but, except the *Cranford* characters, few of the originals have been discovered by anyone outside her own family circle.

CHAPTER III

KNUTSFORD

(1810–1825)

ELIZABETH STEVENSON'S Childhood—Mrs. Lumb—Early Education—*My First French Master*—The Country Town of Knutsford—Knutsford as Portrayed in Mrs. Gaskell's Novels—Parks round Knutsford—Home Life—Other Houses referred to in her Novels—Higgins the Highwayman.

IT was to the little country town she was taken by stage-coach shortly after her mother's death, and there she lived with her aunt, Mrs. Lumb, on the heath side for the first fifteen years of her life.

As a baby she was said to be frail and delicate, but in her aunt she found a second mother, who was devoted to her, especially after the death of her own crippled daughter, Marianne Lumb, who died shortly after Elizabeth Stevenson came to live with her. Mr. Peter Holland, the genial surgeon of Knutsford, took great interest in his little niece from Chelsea, and became the guardian of her health.

When she was about four years old, her father married again, and soon there was a half-brother and then a half-sister to take her place in the Chelsea home. She occasionally visited Chelsea, but from the little we know, these visits did not leave happy memories, and she was glad to get back to her home on the borders of the Knutsford heath.

Her own brother, John Stevenson, stayed with his father, and occasionally came over to Knutsford, much to the delight of his sister, though probably to the dismay of his aunt, for this only brother of Lily Stevenson—the name by which she came to be known

among her relatives—was a mischievous, merry boy, who was fond of playing pranks much as Poor Peter did in *Cranford*.

Her childhood was quite uneventful; she was reared in a quiet, domesticated home, and was surrounded by religious influences. Mrs. Lumb, who had been brought up in the pious home at Sandlebridge, along with Elizabeth Stevenson's mother, was a Dissenter and a member of the old Unitarian Church in Knutsford, to which Elizabeth was taken on Sundays when quite young, becoming a teacher in the Sunday School before she was fifteen, and taking the class of younger children in the school, for she was always devoted to little children. "I was never ambitious . . . but I thought I could manage a house (my mother used to call me her right hand), and I was always so fond of little children—the shyest babies would stretch out their little arms to come to me; when I was a girl, I was half my leisure time nursing in the neighbouring cottages; but I don't know how it was, when I grew sad and grave—which I did a year or two after this time—the little things drew back from me, and I am afraid I lost the knack, though I am just as fond of children as ever, and have a strange yearning at my heart whenever I see a mother with her baby in her arms."

The "year or two after this time" refers to the two years which she spent at a boarding-school at Stratford-on-Avon. Afterwards she returned to Knutsford, sorrowing for the loss at sea of her only brother and anxious about her father's health.

As a child, Elizabeth was highly strung and imaginative, having her heights and depths of joy and sorrow; whatever she experienced she felt keenly, being always over-sensitive. It was so in later life. Whatever pleasure came in her way she enjoyed to

the full, and sorrow, either of her own or of those she loved, affected her acutely.

In *My French Master* she tells something of the quiet, even flow of her early life with her aunt, in the home which was really a small farm, for her aunt kept her pigs, and poultry, ducks and geese, and " set up her cow ; a mark of respectability in Cranford, almost as decided as setting up a gig is among some people," as the narrator of *Cranford* wrote.

Here, in this quiet home on the heath side, " where we fetched and carried and ran errands, and became rosy and dusty, and sang merry songs in the gaiety of our hearts," Elizabeth Stevenson grew to be a beautiful girl, sometimes sad, at times wandering across the heath, delighting in solitary rambles and nature study ; at other times enjoying the games and romps with her young friends and cousins in her own home or at her grandfather Holland's farm.

Once when on a visit to Sandlebridge, whilst romping with these cousins, she rushed through one of the bedrooms and jumped out of the open window on to the lawn beneath, much to the alarm of her relatives, but fortunately she was not injured.

In after years, one who knew her says that she looked back upon her childhood's days as having been rather lonely. Her strong imaginative powers caused her to picture a world where there was more life, more excitement, and probably more struggles.

Here, in Knutsford, everything moved with the regularity of clock-work. Every day had its fixed duties ; baking days and washing days came round week by week, and there was little variety beyond the small tea-parties ; hence the eagerness with which she looked forward to the change to boarding-school when she was about fifteen. Before the entrance of the railway into Knutsford in 1862, the town was

very isolated. The visit of a travelling circus or of a conjuror, such as Signor Brunoni, of Cranford fame, was an event of great importance, and even to-day a travelling circus causes great excitement in the quiet country town.

Very little is known of Elizabeth Stevenson's early education, but her aunt Lumb—whom she speaks of as her mother in her stories—had had an education befitting her position as the daughter of a well-to-do farmer and land agent. The Hollands, like most Unitarians of those days, were keen educationists. There was a "Ladies' Seminary, to which all the tradespeople in Cranford sent their daughters," but there is no record of Elizabeth Stevenson being a pupil at the school.

"I was brought up by old aunts and uncles," writes Mrs. Gaskell, and they, along with her cousins, Miss Mary and Miss Lucy Holland—well-educated women, and much older than Elizabeth Stevenson—who lived at Church House, Knutsford, probably helped in supervising her lessons in her early days.

In *My French Master*, which is largely autobiographical, the novelist writes: "My mother undertook the greater part of our education. We helped her in her household cares during part of the morning; then there came an old-fashioned routine of lessons, such as she herself had learnt when a girl—Goldsmith's *History of England*, Rollin's *Ancient History*, Lindley Murray's *Grammar*, and plenty of sewing and stitching."

Elizabeth's visits to her father at Chelsea were utilised for improving her education, for her father was always anxious that his daughter should be well equipped as far as learning went, and he it was probably who gave her the first lessons in modern languages.

In *North and South*, the novelist says of Margaret Hale, a more or less unconscious portrait of Elizabeth Stevenson herself, " Margaret looked round upon the nursery ; the first room in that house with which she had become familiar nine years ago, when she was brought, all untamed from the forest, to share the home, the play, and the lessons of her cousin." This may refer to her visits to her uncle, Mr. Swinton Holland, in Park Lane, London, or she may have shared the lessons of her half-sister, Catherine Stevenson, in her father's house in Beaufort Row, Chelsea.

Evidently her early education was derived from various sources, but it proved to be sound and efficient, for when fifteen she was sufficiently advanced to take up French, Latin, and Italian at the boarding-school at Stratford-on-Avon, to which she was sent.

As a child, Elizabeth Stevenson was an omnivorous reader, delighting in poetry, and often committing her favourite poems to memory ; her most difficult subject was said to be arithmetic, but she was fond of history and languages. She was very outspoken, and never hesitated to give her own opinion. This in after years was considered a fault, and more than once got her into trouble. " In my own home, whenever people had nothing else to do, they blamed me for want of discretion. Indiscretion was my bugbear fault. Everybody has a bugbear fault ; a sort of standing characteristic—a *pièce de résistance*—for their friends to cut at ; and, in general, they cut and come again." It was this want of discretion in later days that led Mrs. Gaskell to publish all she heard of Branwell Brontë's reckless conduct, a step which afterwards caused her so much anxiety, besides giving pain to others.

Elizabeth Stevenson became very proficient in the French language, and in after life some of her happiest

holidays were spent in France, often with her friend, Madame Mohl, in the Rue du Bac in Paris.

Fortunately, Knutsford was able to furnish an efficient French teacher—a Monsieur Rogier—who, during Elizabeth's girlhood, was employed as a dancing master by the aristocratic families in that part of Cheshire.

Mrs. Gaskell owed much of her interest in French literature, her love of France, and her fluency in the language to her teacher, and in *My French Master* she refers to him under the name of M. de Chalabre.

"Those happy lessons! I remember them now, at a distance of more than fifty years. . . . No half-prepared lessons for him! The patience and the resource with which he illustrated and enforced every precept; the untiring gentleness with which he made our stubborn English tongues pronounce, and mis-pronounce, and re-pronounce certain words; above all, the sweetness of temper which never varied, were such as I have never seen equalled."

The novelist tells of M. de Chalabre's aversion to dirty boots. "If our lessons with my mother were ended pretty early, she would say—'You have been good girls; now you may run to the high point in the clover-field, and see if M. de Chalabre is coming; and if he is, you may walk with him; but take care and give him the cleanest part of the path, for you know he does not like to dirty his boots.'

"This was all very well in theory; but, like many theories, the difficulty was to put it in practice. If we slipped to the side of the path, where the water lay longest, he bowed and retreated behind us to a still wetter place, leaving the clean part for us; yet when we got home, his polished boots would be without a speck, while our shoes were covered with mud."

Mr. Green, in his history of Knutsford, also refers to the same subject :

" There was on the moor a very rare plant, to be found only in three or four places in the whole kingdom ; it is the marsh saxifrage, and it grew on a very swampy part of the moor, on a plot of ground which did not exceed fifty square yards. The Count D'Artois (afterwards Charles X of France) had a rage for rare plants, and his floral passion was known to a French dancing-master then resident in Knutsford—Rogier was his name. The Professor waited on the Count, and together they set out exploring—ditch after ditch they successfully crossed—when, lo ! one wide and deep, with the peculiarly unctuous mire of the locality, arrested their eager progress ; Rogier, being light and a dancing-master, skilfully pirouetted across the abyss ; but the Count, being heavy and not a dancing-master, floundered in, and, like a second Falstaff, having an alacrity at sinking, experienced no little trouble to get again on firm ground." Lady Ritchie says that the saxifrage was always Mrs. Gaskell's favourite flower, and Sir Henry Holland refers to this rare plant being found near his early home at Knutsford.

The great statesman, William Pitt, who was a relative of the Cholmondeleys at Knutsford, received lessons in his youth from Monsieur Rogier, who remarked : " There was nothing whatever in Pitt's dancing to indicate what a great man he would become."

Knutsford has become *the* Gaskell shrine, and is the one that is usually associated with Mrs. Gaskell's name, although she spent the greater part of her life in " Drumble," the busy city of Manchester, sixteen miles away.

Not only was Knutsford the home of her childhood,

but it was in the Knutsford Parish Church that she became the bride of the Rev. William Gaskell, a well-known Unitarian minister of Manchester, and it is in the quiet graveyard, around the ivy-covered Unitarian chapel at Knutsford, that she is buried.

It was this little country town that supplied her with most of the material for her writing, and it was in those novels which portray Knutsford scenes and characters that she put her best work, and these are her most popular stories. The name Knutsford has several suggested origins, the most commonly accepted being that it is derived from the Danish king, Knut or Canute. Tradition says that in 1017, King Canute, on his way to the north, forded the little stream—the Lily—which flowed through the village, and ever afterwards it was called Knutsford. Mrs. Gaskell took much trouble to get the correct origin of the word, and her theory was, that it was derived from the past participle of the verb "to knit," which was formerly "knut," and she thought the name was given because the two streams were joined or knit together in their passage through the town, for there is no actual foundation for the tradition that the Danish king was ever at Knutsford.

A local historian says that an old way of spelling Knutsford is Knottesford, and in a very old map of Cheshire, in the Chetham Library at Manchester, dated 1577, the name is written Knottesfrith, but in the Domesday Book it is known as Cunetsford, which supports the popular derivation of the word. The coat of arms of Knutsford is a figure of King Canute, sitting in front of the sea, bidding the waves retire, and the words underneath are "Canute's Ford." Whilst the Rev. Henry Green, minister of the Unitarian Chapel at Knutsford, was collecting his notes for his lectures on the town, Mrs. Gaskell gave him

valuable assistance, writing many letters to get authentic information. Afterwards, when he decided to amplify these notes with a view to publication, she "gladly did what she could to help him." Mr. Green went to Knutsford in the year 1827, just before Elizabeth Stevenson returned to Knutsford after she left the school at Stratford-on-Avon; but he did not give his lectures on "Knutsford: Its Traditions and History," until 1858, publishing them with some additions in 1859; this was six years after Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford* appeared, and it is very probable that he was prompted to write on Knutsford, because he found in *Cranford* so many historical facts connected with the little town, with which he had made himself quite familiar during his thirty years' residence.

Knutsford is known in Mrs. Gaskell's stories under six different names, and in each she gives a true picture of life in a country town in the early Victorian era.

Duncombe was the first name under which Knutsford appeared in fiction, in Mrs. Gaskell's short story, *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*, published as a serial in 1851, in a magazine known as *The Ladies' Companion*. This story, which deserves to be better known, is a sort of prelude to *Cranford*, for it has the same kindly humour and touching pathos, and it tells of some of the neighbours of the familiar friends who are so well known in *Cranford*.

Knutsford and Cranford have become quite synonymous, and it is said that the present Lord Knutsford jokingly said, when having to choose a title on his elevation to the peerage, "How would Lord Cranford of Knutsford sound?"

After an interval of twelve years, Mrs. Gaskell's thoughts again turned to "her dear native town" for a subject. In 1863 she wrote *Cousin Phillis*, the best

and most perfect of her short stories, in which Knutsford figures as "Eltham."

Just as *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* paved the way for *Cranford*, so *Cousin Phillis* was the forerunner of *Wives and Daughters*, Mrs. Gaskell's last and longest story, for, without any interval, one succeeds the other, both depicting the same district, which in *Wives and Daughters* is known as Hollingford.

In *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*, Mrs. Gaskell gives a very faithful description of the country town.

"Duncombe calls itself a town, but I should call it a village. Really, looking from Jocelyn's, it is a very picturesque place. The houses are anything but regular; they may be mean in their details, but altogether they look well; they have not that flat unrelieved front which many towns of far more pretensions present. Here and there a bow window—every now and then a gable, cutting up against the sky—occasionally a projecting upper storey—throws good effect of light and shadow along the street; and they have a queer fashion of their own of colouring the whitewash of some of the houses with a sort of pink blotting-paper tinge, more like the stone of which Mayence is built than anything else. It may be very bad taste, but to my mind it gives a rich warmth to the colouring. Then, here and there, a dwelling-house has a court in front, with a grass plot on each side of the flagged walk, and a large tree or two—limes or horse-chestnuts—which send their great projecting upper branches over into the street, making round, dry places of shelter on the pavement in the times of summer showers."

This little town still answers to the above description in many respects. The house in which Elizabeth Stevenson was received as a baby, and where her childhood was spent, is still to be seen in front of the

KNUTSFORD, 1863

(*The Misses Holland at the window*)

heath or "common," as it is generally called, where the Royal May-Day Festival is annually celebrated and the maypole is erected, and over which Elizabeth used to wander when a little, lonely girl, making friends with the birds and the wild heath flowers, and exercising freely her own vivid imagination.

Knutsford is surrounded by some of the finest well-wooded parks in the kingdom, and this accounts for Mrs. Gaskell's reference to her "forest home."

Some of these parks, with their stately mansions, are mentioned in her stories. Tatton Park, the home of Earl Egerton, figures as Cumnor Towers in *Wives and Daughters*, and reminiscences of Toft Hall and Old Tabley have suggested the home of the Hamleys.

Writing in 1838, she describes Old Tabley Park, which was once the home of Sir Peter Leycester, the historian of Cheshire: "The old hall was galleried with oak settles and old armour hung up in a painted window from ceiling to floor." In this letter Mrs. Gaskell gives a very happy account of the picnics which she used to enjoy when a girl at Knutsford. Some rode on donkeys, others on ponies, whilst the village carts were also pressed into service, and the merry party went, some with books, others with luncheon baskets, and several prepared to make sketches. The particulars of one of these picnics is given in *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*, and the destination is evidently Tabley Hall: "There was a moat round the house, with a boat; and there was a gallery in the hall, from which music sounded delightfully. The family to whom the place belonged were abroad, and lived at a newer and grander mansion, when they were at home."

In this story Mrs. Gaskell mentions, the merry party —some on horses, others in a chaise—"but most of

the young people wished to go in the cart, I don't know why."

Green's *History of Knutsford* is useful as a key to several of Mrs. Gaskell's stories, for it contains facts about Knutsford which appear as fiction in several of her novels, though the fiction makes much pleasanter reading, and is written by one who had "something of angelic light," which could see beyond the actual facts, and show the kindly spirit which characterised the doings of these simple village folk.

Writing of the celebrities of Knutsford, Mr. Green says: "Mrs. Gaskell, the author of *Mary Barton* and of several other tales of deep interest, may be claimed as belonging to this town, during her infancy and early life up to the time of her marriage," and adds, "There is one work of hers—*Cranford*—which, in my judgment, while depicting life in almost any country town, is specially descriptive of some of the past and present social characteristics of Knutsford. I know that the work was not intended to delineate this place chiefly or especially, but a little incident within my own experience will show the accuracy of the pictures as applied to our town. A woman of advanced age, who was confined to her house through illness, about three years ago, asked me to lend her an amusing or cheerful book. I lent her *Cranford*, without telling her to what it was supposed to relate: she read the tale of 'Life in a Country Town,' and when I called again, she was full of eagerness to say, 'Why, sir! that *Cranford* is all about Knutsford; my old mistress, Miss Harker, is mentioned in it; and our poor cow, she did go to the field in a large flannel waistcoat, because she had burned herself in a lime-pit.' For myself I must say that I consider *Cranford* to be full of good-natured humour and kindliness of spirit."

Readers of *Cranford* have laughed over Miss Betsy

Barker's poor cow, which tumbled into one of the lime-pits on the heath, and, as the novelist says, "came out looking naked, cold and miserable in a bare skin," and at Captain Brown's advice to her, "Get a flannel waistcoat and flannel drawers, ma'am, if you wish to keep her alive." "Miss Betsy Barker dried her eyes, and thanked the Captain heartily; she set to work, and by-and-bye all the town turned out to see the Alderney, meekly going to her pasture, clad in dark grey flannel." "I have watched her myself many a time," wrote the author of *Cranford*.

Mrs. Tollemache says Captain Brown was Captain Hill, an adjutant of the Cheshire Yeomanry, of which Lord Egerton was the colonel. "His knowledge of military discipline and details made him a valuable help to his colonel, while his honest, upright nature and loyal affection endeared him to us all." This agrees with what Mrs. Gaskell says:

"Captain Brown made himself respected in Cranford, and was called upon, in spite of all resolutions to the contrary. I was surprised to hear his opinions quoted as authority at a visit which I paid to Cranford about a year after he had settled in the town. My own friends had been among the bitterest opponents of any proposal to visit the Captain and his daughters only twelve months before; and now he was even admitted in the tabooed hours before twelve."

It is probable that Mrs. Gaskell did not mean to put the real Captain Hill into her story, but his kind and eccentric character would suggest the accommodating Captain Brown, of whom Ruskin wrote, after reading *Cranford*: "I flew into a passion at Captain Brown being killed, and would not go any further."

John Forster, who was one of Mrs. Gaskell's most helpful critics, wrote: "I could quarrel with you for killing the poor Captain."

Mrs. Gaskell's explanation of this is that the first two chapters of *Cranford* were meant to be just one complete sketch in *Household Words*. She, therefore, killed Captain Brown, much against her own will.

But Charles Dickens was so pleased with the first instalment, that he begged for more; and so these descriptive sketches of the little country town went on at intervals, from December, 1851, to May, 1853, charming the readers by their kindly humour, the like of which had no parallel, for *Cranford* holds its own as a classic without either kith or kindred. As there is a village near Hounslow, in Middlesex, called Cranford, and also one in Northamptonshire, it is well to know that Mrs. Gaskell's sketches refer to Knutsford in Cheshire.

The other character that Mrs. Tollemache claims to have known is the original of Thomas Holbrook, Miss Matty's faithful lover. He was a small squire who had property just outside the town.

These identifications make Cranford live as a bit of real life.

Mrs. Gaskell's cousins, Miss Mary and Miss Lucy Holland, daughters of Dr. Peter Holland, of Knutsford, were recognised by those who knew them as the originals of Miss Deborah and Miss Matty Jenkyns. Twenty years after Mrs. Gaskell wrote *Cranford*, a member of the Holland family, Mrs. Mary Sibylla Holland, was staying at Church House with the old aunts, the Misses Holland, and the letters that she wrote telling of the sayings of these aunts show clearly that they were the same sisters whom Mrs. Gaskell has portrayed with so much kindness and humour in *Cranford*.

These ladies lived to a good old age, and Mrs. Gaskell often visited them. Miss Lucy Holland died at Church House in 1883, at the age of eighty-three,

and her sister, Mary Holland, died in 1887, aged eighty-five. They were cultured, benevolent women, who did much to help the poor in Knutsford. Miss Mary Holland lived in Brook Street, London, for some time, superintending the home of her brother, Sir Henry Holland, and acting as guardian to his children after the death of his first wife. On his second marriage to Saba, the favourite daughter of Sydney Smith, she returned to Knutsford, where she was considered quite an authority amongst the Amazons; and her life in London, where she had mixed with the best society, which included such literary people as Hallam, Miss Edgeworth, the Barbaulds, and the Aitkens, gave her an advantage over the genteel society of *Cranford*. Evidently Miss Deborah was very advanced: "Miss Jenkyns would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men. Equal indeed! She knew they were superior."

One old institution mentioned in *Cranford*, "The Benefit Society for the Poor," is still in existence. It owed its inauguration to Mrs. Holland, the first wife of Dr. Peter Holland, a niece of Josiah Wedgwood, and mother of Miss Mary and Miss Lucy Holland and also of Sir Henry Holland.

The home in which the story was told of the cat swallowing the lace, and where the Hon. Mrs. Jamieson lived, is still to be seen near to the old Brook Street Chapel.

"That lady lived in a large house just outside the town. A road, which had known what it was to be a street, ran right before the house, which opened out upon it, without any intervening garden or court. Whatever the sun was about, he never shone on the front of that house."

A part of the road has been enclosed in front of the house, so that now it has a small forecourt.

The story of the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson is founded on actual facts, for there lived in Brook House, to give it its true name, Lady Jane Stanley, one of the former notabilities of Knutsford. She was a quaint lady, with very strict ideas of propriety. It was her custom to walk out in state with a gold-headed cane, which reminds us of "My Lady Ludlow," a character based to a large extent on this eccentric old lady.

In those days there were no footpaths in the street, only the hard stone cobbles; and as Lady Jane Stanley felt the discomfort of these, she left a sum of money to provide a footpath. As, however, she disliked seeing young people walk arm-in-arm, she stipulated that this footpath should be only the width of a single "flag"—just wide enough, in fact, for one person, as she did not wish to encourage the common form of "courting."

As a result of this, if the lasses occupied the flags, the swains had either to walk behind or pick their way in the channels.

The *Royal George*, so named in honour of George IV, with its adjoining Assembly Rooms, and beautiful old oak furniture and old china, is still to be seen. It was there that Miss Pole, strolling up the staircase, met Signor Brunoni, the conjuror: "I went on, not thinking of what I was about, when, all at once, I perceived that I was in the middle of the preparations for to-morrow night—the room being divided with great clothes-maids, over which Crosby's men were tacking red flannel; very dark and odd it seemed; it quite bewildered me, and I was going on behind the screens, in my absence of mind, when a gentleman stepped forward and asked if I had any business he could arrange for me. He spoke such pretty broken English, I could not help thinking of Thaddeus of

MISS MATTY'S TEA-SHOP, KNUTSFORD

(See p. 66)

THE ROYAL GEORGE, KNUTSFORD

Warsaw, and the Hungarian Brothers, and Santo Sebastiani ; and while I was busy picturing his past life to myself, he had bowed me out of the room. . . .

" Miss Pole, then, had seen the conjuror . . . and numerous were the questions we all asked her. ' Had he a beard ? ' ' Was he young or old ? ' ' Fair, or dark ? ' ' Did he look '—(unable to shape my question prudently, I put it in another form)—' How did he look ? ' In short, Miss Pole was the heroine of the evening."

Nothing worth noting in this little town failed to find a place in Mrs. Gaskell's stories. In a letter to Ruskin, she confesses that much of *Cranford* is founded on fact, and that she knew more than she dare tell, for fear it should be considered too " far-fetched."

Knutsford still keeps its sedan chair as a memento of bygone days, and it is used once a year at the May-Day celebrations. This is probably the only town in England which now annually finds a use for this ancient conveyance.

Whilst the old folk-lore songs and the Morris dances are being revived in many towns and villages, Knutsford has the distinction of having retained the old English May-Day Sports, which, on the 1st of May, are held on the village green, when the May Queen is annually elected and crowned in the presence of the public. Thousands of people from the surrounding towns and villages crowd into Knutsford on that day, and if the weather is only favourable, one of the prettiest outdoor pageants in England is to be witnessed : a day which recalls the time when this country was known as " Merrie England."

Mrs. Gaskell does not mention these May-Day Sports, for, until the year 1862, nine years after *Cranford* was published, they were very simple affairs. Since that year they have been conducted on a very elaborate scale.

In the year 1887, the then Prince and Princess of Wales, the late gracious King and the Queen, were present at the May-Day celebration, and expressed their delight at witnessing these old-time festivities. In honour of this event, the word "Royal" was allowed to be used as a prefix in describing these sports. At this time Knutsford was the only place where the village pageant was held, but now other towns and villages are sharing in the representation of bygone scenes and characters, and by this means are helping to keep green the memory of life in England in former days, and to give realistic scenes of mediæval times.

As long as *Cranford* lives, Mrs. Gaskell's name will be held in affectionate remembrance. Edna Lyall has described it as her favourite book, and one that soothed her in sickness. Ruskin revelled in its pages, and read it over and over again. Charlotte Brontë found in it a charm which she always associated with the winning personality of her friend and contemporary.

On receiving a letter from Mrs. Gaskell, she says: "Thank you for your letter. It was as pleasant as a quiet chat, as welcome as Spring showers, as reviving as a friend's visit; in short, it was very like a page of *Cranford*."

It was the only one of her own books which Mrs. Gaskell could read and enjoy over and over again, and it was the one that had nothing but pleasant memories for her, except that some of her relatives thought she had taken too great a liberty in putting them in a story without their permission. *Cranford* counterbalanced *Mary Barton*, which was said to have too many death-bed scenes—"the book with a sob in it." *Cranford* "sparkles with humour and ripples with laughter, which will pass on from one generation to another."

Many whose memory carries them back to the

THE OLD SEDAN CHAIR, USED AT KNUTSFORD

A CRANFORD LADY

" fifties " have read Mrs. Gaskell's old-time story and claimed kindred with it, because they remember a *Cranford* of their own, where they met the originals of Miss Matty and her friends in their early days. This leads them to say, " How true to life it is," whilst they linger over the old-fashioned characters.

Even Americans smile and think they recognise *Cranford* as a New England village, which has found itself placed in fiction as an English town ; and Lady Ritchie says she knew it as a village near Paris, and, later, at Kensington or Chiswick.

Some years ago the writer gave a copy of *Cranford* to a friend who was on a visit to a small town in Somersetshire, and the latter wrote saying : " I believe this is the original of *Cranford ;* it is just such an old-world place as Mrs. Gaskell describes. I suppose you knew the place, and thought I should be interested in reading *Cranford* in its original home."

Evidently the story is typical of the life of many small provincial towns in the early Victorian era, when the " poke " bonnet and the " gigot " sleeves were *de rigueur.*

Mrs. Gaskell claims that this *Cranford* had the honour of clinging to its old customs and fashions longer than any other small town, for she writes : " I will answer for it, the last ' gigot,' the last tight and scanty petticoat in wear in England, was seen at Cranford, and seen without a smile."

In *Cranford* we get side-lights on Elizabeth Stevenson's home life at Knutsford, though that prose idyll mostly refers to a later period of her life, when she was considered old enough to make her *début* in the genteel society of Cranford.

There is much in Miss Matty Jenkyns' kindly nature which fits in with Elizabeth Stevenson's aunt Hannah, Mrs. Lumb, the only mother she ever knew.

In the story, the description of Mrs. Fitz-Adam accords with Mrs. Lumb, who was the widowed sister of the Cranford surgeon. . . . "Their parents were respectable farmers, content with their station. The name of these good people was Hoggins. Mr. Hoggins was the Cranford doctor now; he disliked the name and considered it coarse; but, as Miss Jenkyns said, if he changed it to Piggins, it would not be much better." Miss Mary Hoggins, in the story, married Mr. Fitz-Adam, and left the neighbourhood for many years. Miss Hannah Holland married Mr. Henry Lumb, of Wakefield, and left the district for a time, afterwards returning to live in the "large rambling house" on the heath side.

Of this old home of her childhood, Mrs. Gaskell writes: "It had been usually considered to confer a patent of gentility upon its tenant, because, once upon a time, seventy or eighty years before, the spinster daughter of an earl had resided in it.

"I am not sure if the inhabiting this house was not also believed to convey some unusual power of intellect; for the earl's daughter, Lady Jane, had a sister, Lady Anne, who had married a general officer in the time of the American War, and this general officer had written one or two comedies, which were still acted on the London boards, and which, when we saw them advertised, made us all draw up and feel that Drury Lane was paying a very pretty compliment to Cranford."

It was in this house that many of the little tea parties were held, and it was there that Elizabeth Stevenson learnt to practise that "elegant economy" which stood her in such good stead in after years when dispensing her unostentatious hospitality in Manchester.

"'Elegant economy!' How naturally one falls

back into the phraseology of Cranford! There, economy was always 'elegant,' and money-spending always 'vulgar and ostentatious'; a sort of sour grapism, which made us very peaceful and satisfied." This "elegant economy" is portrayed when Mrs. Forester gives a party in her baby house of a dwelling: "Where we now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent up, though she knew, and we knew, and she knew that we knew, and we knew that she knew that we knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea—bread, and sponge-cakes."

Commenting on this, Mrs. Gaskell says: "There were one or two consequences arising from this general but unacknowledged poverty, and this very much acknowledged gentility, which were not amiss, and which might be introduced into many circles of society to their great improvement. For instance, the inhabitants of Cranford kept early hours, and clattered home in their pattens, under the guidance of a lantern-bearer, about nine o'clock at night; and the whole town was abed and asleep by half-past ten. Moreover, it was considered 'vulgar' (a tremendous word in Cranford) to give anything expensive in the way of eatable or drinkable at the evening entertainment."

Speaking of individual economy, the novelist says: "I have often noticed that almost every one has his own individual small economies." She then goes on to tell of a friend of hers whose pet aversion was the waste of writing paper. "Envelopes fretted his soul terribly when they first came in; the only way in which he could reconcile himself to such waste of his cherished article was by patiently turning inside-out all that were sent to him, and so making them serve again. . . . I am not above owning that I have this human weakness myself. String is my foible. My pockets get full of little hanks of it, picked up and

twisted together ready for uses that never come. I am seriously annoyed if any one cuts the string of a parcel instead of patiently and faithfully undoing it fold by fold."

The large red-brick house on the edge of the common, to which Elizabeth Stevenson was brought as a baby, and in which she spent her childhood, contains large rooms, cosy ingle nooks, and many comfortable window-seats. Her aunt must have been fairly well off to take so large a house for herself and her daughter. The front windows look on to the heath, which stretches for miles. There is a small garden in front, with a modest gate and fence. At the back of the house is a large garden, with a lawn, flower-garden, and tennis court ; beyond that is a well-stocked kitchen garden. When Elizabeth Stevenson lived there, the garden was much larger, reaching to the wall of the Knutsford Gaol in the distance.

In the centre of the lawn, in front of the drawing-room window, is a large, old fir tree, under whose thick branches the future novelist used to take a little stool, and sit for hours absorbed in a book and quite oblivious of the outer world. It was of this garden that Mrs. Gaskell wrote in *My French Master :* " We seemed to have our French lessons more frequently in the garden than in the house ; for there was a sort of harbour on the lawn near the drawing-room window, to which we always found it easy to carry a table and chairs, and all the rest of the lesson paraphernalia, if my mother did not prohibit a lesson *al fresco*."

The house has been modernised, but not to advantage from the antiquarian point of view. The old oak stairs have been painted white. In former days, they were polished to perfection and " guileless of a covering." There is a larger room on the first floor,

MRS. LUMB'S HOUSE

looking over the garden, which is said to have been the nursery, when Elizabeth Stevenson and her cousin shared this airy apartment as their special domain. Leading from this is a small room fitted with shelves, which is said to have served as a toy closet, where the baby Stevenson kept her dolls, though before her time it was said to have been used by a former tenant as a powder-room in the days when wigs were worn. This little girl, who was to immortalise her "dear adopted native town," was very fond of dolls, and her passionate attachment to children, and especially to babies, is well known to those who enjoyed her friendship in after years. Most of the rooms are beautifully panelled in oak, and it is probable that it is the very house which Mrs. Gaskell mentions in *Cranford* as being the one "in which the spinster daughter of the earl had resided."

There are two kitchens, both large and in keeping with the other rooms, the ovens being conspicuous for their size. The larger kitchen has no fewer than four ovens, and is similar to many in the farmhouses in Cheshire.

It was in that kitchen that Elizabeth Stevenson learnt the art of cooking, in which she excelled. The house was really a small farm, and almost all the food cooked in Mrs. Lumb's kitchen was home produce.

Smith, in his account of Cheshire, writes of the women of this district: "Touching their housekeeping, it is bountiful, and comparable with any other shire in the realm. . . . They lay out seldom any money for any provision, but have it of their own, as beef, mutton, veal, pork, capons, hens, wildfowl, and fish. They bake their own bread and brew their own drink."

Mrs. Gaskell's reputation as an excellent housekeeper and trainer of servants for every branch of

household work was well known in Manchester, and this she owed to her own domestic training in her early home. A Manchester lady, who had experienced great difficulties with her maids, secured one who was the daughter of an old servant of Mrs. Gaskell, and congratulated herself that she had at last found one " that would be *sure* to be a treasure."

The road leading to the novelist's early home is known as Gaskell Avenue. There are several other houses in the same road in the front of the heath, which, though now enclosed, was an open common when Elizabeth Stevenson lived there. In her time, certain residents were allowed to turn a number of cattle on the heath. The front gardens to these houses are still kept with much care, and it was of the ladies in these houses that Mrs. Gaskell thought when she wrote : " For keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers, without a weed to speck them ; for frightening away little boys who looked wistfully at the said flowers through the railings ; for rushing out at the geese which occasionally venture into the gardens if the gates are left open ; for deciding all questions of literature and politics without troubling themselves with unnecessary reasons or arguments ; for obtaining clear and correct knowledge of everybody's affairs in the parish ; for keeping their neat maid-servants in admirable order ; for kindness (somewhat dictatorial) to the poor, and real tender good offices to each other whenever they are in distress—the ladies of Cranford are quite sufficient."

The novelist describes the approach to Tabley Hall as she knew it when a girl. " The road to the old hall was along a sandy lane, with high hedge-banks ; the wych-elms almost met overhead . . . it was very pleasant and picturesque-looking. The trees were gorgeous, in their orange and crimson hues, varied by

great dark green holly bushes, glistening in the autumn sun. I should have thought the colours too vivid, if I had seen them in a picture, especially when we wound up the brow, after crossing the little bridge over the brook—(what laughing and screaming there was as the cart splashed through the sparkling water !) —and I caught the purple hills beyond. We could see the old hall, too, from that point, with its warm rich woods billowing up behind, and the blue waters of the moat lying still under the sunlight."

In her letter to the Howitts she tells of her young friends singing old school songs, such as " Through the greenwood, through the greenwood," or " A boat, a boat, haste to the ferry," at the close of a day's outing at Old Tabley.

In *Mr. Harrison's Confessions* she writes : " The sun was getting low, but the declining light was beautiful upon the water ; and to add to the charm of the time, Sophy and her sisters, standing on the green lawn in front of the hall, struck up the little German canon, which I had never heard before—

' O wie wohl ist mir am abend,' etc."

All the stories founded on the doings of the little country town, which include *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*, *Cranford*, *Cousin Phillis*, *Wives and Daughters*, *The Squire's Story*, and *A Dark Night's Work*, are associated with Mrs. Gaskell's life. She wrote of what she knew and from actual experience ; her descriptions are of real places, and the simple events, chronicled with such skill and artistic finish, are founded on facts with which she was quite familiar. Like Charlotte Brontë, she was careful not to get out of her depth, when writing of people and places, so that her stories were more real than imaginative. Mrs. Gaskell could have said of herself what Charlotte

Brontë wrote: "Details, situations which I do not understand, cannot personally respect, I would not for the world meddle with."

In a letter which Mrs. Gaskell wrote in 1858, asking for authentic information about one of the oldest families in Knutsford, she concluded her letter by quoting Southey: "How good and well it would be, if every parish priest would write down what he hears and learns about his own parish, as traits of customs and manners and characters might then be preserved as memoirs."

That is just what Mrs. Gaskell has done for Knutsford. In her stories she has preserved for future generations the manners, customs, and characters which were in vogue in provincial towns during the early part of the Victorian era, so that it may not be forgotten that the correct time for paying calls in those days was between twelve o'clock and three o'clock, and that pattens were worn by the ladies to keep their feet dry, and that, in addition to carrying a big umbrella, the society ladies of Cranford wore a shield called a "calash," which Mrs. Gaskell describes as "a covering worn over caps, not unlike the heads fastened on old-fashioned gigs; but sometimes it is not quite so large."

In gathering her materials for *Cranford*, Mrs. Gaskell had access to many old family letters, which she searched for facts for her stories. In her chapter on "old letters" in *Cranford*, she tells of the reading of some of them, which evidently referred to herself, for she had a genius for the skilful use of juxtaposition, and when she quotes the letter between the young mother and the grandmother "about the prettiest little baby that ever was seen": "Dear mother, I wish you could see her! Without any parshality, I do think she will grow up a regular bewty!" which,

in *Cranford*, refers to Miss Matty when a baby, it is doubtless a description of herself as given by her own mother; and those evenings spent over the burning of some of those old letters was a reminiscence of a visit to Knutsford, where she eagerly scanned her parents' letters for facts of her own life. "Miss Matty did grudge burning these letters, it was evident. She would not let them be carelessly passed over with any quiet reading, and skipping, to myself. She took them from me, and even lighted the second candle in order to read them aloud with a proper emphasis, and without stumbling over the big words."

"Oh, dear! how I wanted facts instead of reflections, before those letters were concluded! They lasted us two nights; and I won't deny that I made use of the time to think of many other things, and yet I was always at my post at the end of each sentence."

It is from the chapters entitled "Old Letters" and "Poor Peter" that the little that is known of Elizabeth Stevenson's brother is revealed. "Poor Peter was at school at Shrewsbury by this time. The Rector took up his pen, and rubbed up his Latin once more, to correspond with his boy. It was very clear that the lad's were what are called show letters. They were of a highly mental description, giving an account of his studies, and his intellectual hopes of various kinds, with an occasional quotation from the classics; but, now and then, the animal nature broke out in such a little sentence as this, evidently written in a trembling hurry, after the letter had been inspected: 'Mother, dear, do send me a cake, and put plenty of citron in.'

"Presently it became very evident that 'Poor Peter' got himself into many scrapes. There were letters of stilted penitence to his father for some wrong-doing; and, among them all, was a badly-written, badly-sealed, badly-directed, blotted note:

'My dear, dear, dear, dearest mother, I will be a better boy; I will, indeed; but don't, please, be ill for me; I am not worth it; but I will be good, darling mother.'

"Miss Matty could not speak for crying, after she had read this note. She gave it to me in silence, and then got up and took it to her sacred recesses in her own room, for fear, by any chance, it might get burnt.

"'Poor Peter!' she said; 'he was always in scrapes; he was too easy. They led him wrong and then left him in the lurch. But he was too fond of mischief. He could never resist a joke. Poor Peter.' . . . . ."

And afterwards, when Poor Peter ran away to sea, "she would speak of how she thought Peter stood a good chance of being admiral very soon—he was so brave and clever; and how she thought of seeing him in his navy uniform, and what sort of hats admirals wore; and how much more fit he was to be a sailor than a clergyman."

Within a few yards of Mrs. Lumb's is an ivy-covered house, formerly known as the old Cann Office, where the weights and scales were tested. It is, however, better known as Higgins, the highwayman's house, and, as one writer describes it, "a very cannie house." As a girl, Elizabeth Stevenson had to pass "the haunted house," as it was called, on her way to and from her home, and it is probable that the shy and nervous girl would hurry past the house on winters' nights, for it was often "to let." There were said to be underground passages leading from the cellars to the caves on the heath beyond.

Higgins, also, was the highwayman hero of one of Mrs. Gaskell's shorter tales, *The Squire's Story*, which was contributed to the Christmas number of *Household Words* in 1853.

The story was based upon actual fact. Higgins

lived in Knutsford (which, for the sake of saving the respectability of the little town, was called Barford, and placed in Derbyshire) for about eight years, from 1757 to 1765. In the register of the parish church at Knutsford may be seen the entry of his marriage and the baptism certificates of his five children. Their graves are also pointed out by the genial verger to strangers interested in the story.

De Quincey, in his *Autobiographic Sketches*, tells his version of the highwayman's career, and mentions that his skeleton was to be seen in White's Museum in Manchester.

Hinchliffe, in his learned and interesting account of the parish of Barthomley, gives some additional stories concerning Higgins' life ; and the *Universal Magazine*, a complete magazine, for November, 1767, relates some accounts of the noted Higgins "who was lately executed at Carmarthen."

He appears to have been a true "knight of the road," whose feats remind us of Dick Turpin, who is also reputed to have visited Knutsford. No doubt Higgins selected Knutsford as being a convenient centre for his expeditions on account of its proximity to Manchester and Liverpool, and its easy access to Chester, the county town. His appearance as a resident in Knutsford excited no suspicion of his true character, and he obtained access to the best social life of the place. His splendid horse attracted more attention from the country folk than he did himself, and it was only by slow degrees and with cumulative evidence that his means of obtaining wealth to keep up his style of living aroused any suspicion. His wife was quite ignorant of his free mode of life, and his absence for a month or two to "collect his rents" was considered as a necessary if inconvenient duty, especially as he usually returned from these excursions

with plenty of cash. In his last letter, addressed to the Sheriff immediately before his execution at Carmarthen on November 7th, 1767, he expressly states that his wife had no knowledge of his villainy, and he pleads for some consideration to her.

The story of Higgins' life is told very graphically by Mrs. Gaskell. She never had any trouble in weaving facts and fiction, for her wonderful imaginative powers, clothed with a halo of romance the lives of the people whom she knew and of whom she heard.

She was a born story-teller, and could always make the most trivial statements real and intensely interesting.

The account of Higgins, relating to Mr. Davis the crime which he had committed at Bath, is very well told, and gives Mrs. Gaskell a chance of revealing the man, other than the murderer. This was a mark of genius which she always possessed—the power of being for the time the *other* person. She could enter into other people's feelings and show the redeeming side of their character :

" 'At first it is supposed—for, you understand, all this is mere guesswork—it is supposed that he asked her civilly enough to give him her money, or to tell him where it was ; but the old miser defied him, and would not ask for mercy and give up her keys, even when he threatened her, but looked him in the face as if he had been a baby. Oh, God! Mr. Davis, I once dreamt, when I was a little innocent boy, that I should commit a crime like this, and I wakened up crying ; and my mother comforted me—that is the reason I tremble so now.' "

Later on, she again shows the man, stripped of all cruelty and bravado.

" I should not wonder if he repented after all, and

did bitter penance for his crime; and, if so—will there be mercy for him at the last day?"

In concluding *The Squire's Story*, Mrs. Gaskell says: "I saw the White House not a month ago; it was to let; perhaps for the twentieth time since Mr. Higgins occupied it; but still the tradition goes in Barford, that, once upon a time, a highwayman lived there, and amassed untold treasures, and that the ill-gotten wealth yet remains walled up in some unknown, concealed chamber; but in what part of the house no one knows.

"Will any of you become tenants, and try to find out this mysterious closet? I can furnish the exact address to any applicant who wishes for it."

CHAPTER IV

(1810–1825)

CHURCH HOUSE AND TATTON PARK, KNUTSFORD

CHURCH House—Dr. Peter Holland—Characters in *Wives and Daughters*—Lady Egerton's Garden Party—*Molly Gibson*—Tatton Park.

AFTER her aunt's home on the heath side, there was no house more familiar to Elizabeth Stevenson in her girlhood than Church House, the home of her uncle, Dr. Peter Holland. Mrs. Gaskell always looked back with gratitude to the kindness which she received from this uncle, who, with daughters of his own, treated her as a member of his own family. Although he met with a serious accident, being thrown from his gig in the autumn of 1807, he lived to a ripe old age. He died in 1852, being nursed most tenderly in his last illness by his unmarried daughters. His death occurred in the same year that the Cranford Sketches were going through *Household Words*.

This genial surgeon is still held in kindly remembrance in Knutsford. His assiduous attention to his patients gave rise to a rather ghastly joke; because his house looked over the burial ground of the church close by, "the good doctor never loses sight of his patients," said the Cranfordians. He is generally supposed to have been the original of Dr. Hoggins in *Cranford*, Dr. Morgan in *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*, and the kind Dr. Gibson in *Wives and Daughters*, though Mrs. Gaskell's daughters say that nobody could be more unlike their mother's uncle than Dr. Gibson. It is possible that Dr. Peter Colthurst, the novelist's great uncle, who was the

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doctor at Knutsford, and died in the year 1769, may have been responsible for some of the medical characters in Mrs. Gaskell's works. Nevertheless, it was Dr. Peter Holland that suggested the good type of country doctor to Mrs. Gaskell.

" He used to reckon that he rode the world around in the course of the year. There were not many surgeons in the country who had so wide a range of practice as he; he went to lonely cottages on the borders of the great commons; to farm-houses at the end of narrow country lanes that led to nowhere else, and were overshadowed by the elms and beeches overhead. He attended all the gentry within a circle of fifteen miles round Hollingford, and was the appointed doctor to the still greater families who went up to London every February—as the fashion then was—and returned to their acres in the early weeks of July." This applies to Mrs. Gaskell's uncle, Peter Holland, in every particular. It was certainly Church House that the novelist had in mind when writing of the home of Dr. Gibson and his daughter Molly, for so well does the house answer to her description, that picture postcards of it are sold in Knutsford as Molly Gibson's House, though it is now known by the name of Hollingford House.

The chief characters connected with *Wives and Daughters* are all associated with Church House, which is still there, close by the church in which Mrs. Gaskell was married, though it is not used as a doctor's residence now. Every room in the house suggests some incident in Mrs. Gaskell's stories, from the hall in which Molly Gibson nervously welcomed her stepmother, with its deep window-seats and hospitable entrance, to the small bedroom where Molly woke early on the morning of her first visit to the Towers, and jumped out of bed to examine her new bonnet,

and to lift the blind in order to see what the weather would be like.

"'Oh! it will be a fine day! I was afraid it never, never would come; or that, if it ever came, it would be a rainy day!'" Referring to this, Mrs. Gaskell writes: "Five-and-forty years ago, children's pleasures in a country town were very simple, and Molly had lived for twelve long years without the occurrence of any event so great as that which was now impending. Poor child! it is true she had lost her mother, which was a jar to the whole tenour of her life. . . . The pleasure she was looking forward to to-day was her first share in a kind of annual festival in Hollingford."

This annual festival was the garden-party given by Lady Egerton of Tatton to the ladies of Knutsford, who helped her with her charity school, which was close by Tatton Park gates. The novelist's reference to "the poor child who had lost her mother" gives her an interest in Molly Gibson when hearing that she is to have a stepmother. "Sobbing till she was wearied out. . . . she had cast herself on the ground—that natural throne for violent sorrow—and leant up against the old moss-grown seat; sometimes burying her face in her hands; sometimes clasping them together, as if by the tight, painful grasp of her fingers she could deaden mental suffering."

On the first floor is the large drawing-room, with its old-fashioned bow-window of bent glass overlooking the garden, where the flower-beds are designed exactly as they were when Mrs. Gaskell visited her cousins nearly sixty years ago. It was in that drawing-room that the worldly-wise Mrs. Gibson welcomed the squire's sons, taking care to give the preference to the elder. There Cynthia thanked Osborne Hamley for the bouquet of flowers. "'Oh, you must not thank me exclusively; I believe it was my thought, but

Roger took all the trouble of it.' 'I consider the thought as everything,' said Mrs. Gibson; 'thought is spiritual, while action is merely material.' This fine sentence took the speaker herself by surprise."

On the ground floor is the dining-room where Doctor Holland's medical pupils used to dine with him and his daughters.

"The two awkward lads rose up with joyful alacrity; gave him a nod which was to be interpreted as a bow, knocked against each other in their endeavours to get out of the dining-room quickly, and then might be heard dashing along a passage, which led to the surgery, choking with half-suppressed laughter."

To the left of the garden are the stables, where the doctor kept his horses, which carried him over "his rounds of thirty miles," sometimes accompanied by his niece. "The back-seat shut up, and the light weight going swiftly and merrily bumping over the stone-paved lanes. 'Oh, this is charming!' said Molly, after a toss-up on her seat from a tremendous bump."

The earlier part of *Wives and Daughters* is full of information about Knutsford and its doings when Mrs. Gaskell was a girl, and the heroine, Molly Gibson, is partly an unconscious portrait of the novelist, especially in the chapter of Molly Gibson's childhood. Molly's governess was a Miss Eyre, which brings visions of Charlotte Brontë's most popular character.

"Occasionally Betty lost her temper entirely, and spoke impertinently to Miss Eyre; but, when this had been done in Molly's defence, the girl flew out in such a violent passion of words in defence of her silent trembling governess, that even Betty herself was daunted. . . . 'Bless the child! one 'ud think I was a hungry pussy cat, and she a hen-sparrow,

with her wings all fluttering, and her little eyes aflame, and her beak ready to peck me.' . . . But the poor governess saw no humour in the affair . . . and began to reprove Molly for giving way to her passion, and the child thought it hard to be blamed for what she considered her just anger against Betty." "But, after all, these were the small grievances of a very happy childhood," writes Mrs. Gaskell, in concluding this chapter on Molly Gibson's childhood. This retrospection is noticeable through all Mrs. Gaskell's stories, especially at the conclusion of her chapters. In writing of her past life, she remembers the best side, and always looks back with gratitude to those who were kind to her. The story also refers to the time after her school days at Stratford-on-Avon, when she returned to Knutsford before joining her father at Chelsea.

"She had found her way into the library, and used to undo the heavy bars of the shutters, if the housemaid had forgotten this duty, and mount the ladder, sitting on the steps for an hour at a time, deep in some book of the old English Classics. The summer days were very short to this happy girl of seventeen."

William Stevenson, throughout his life, was a great reader, and, as a boy, often became oblivious of everything about him when he met with an interesting book. His daughter, when a girl, resembled him in these respects. She would sit for hours, regardless of everything about her when reading an attractive book. She was just seventeen when she left school and returned to Knutsford.

Molly Gibson is one of the sweetest and most captivating girl heroines to be found in English literature. Lady Ritchie, in an old number of the *Cornhill*, says :

"She is the dearest of heroines, a born lady, unconsciously noble and generous in every thought—it makes one the happier to know that Mollys exist, even in fiction, and one is grateful to those who can depict such characters from their own vivid perceptions and experience."

This heroine of Mrs. Gaskell's last and what is generally considered her best book, *Wives and Daughters*—an everyday story—is so irresistible, as she flits across the pages, that one wonders why the writer did not make her name the title of what, alas! came to be her crowning work. The novel tells of Molly's trials and triumphs during a most interesting period of her life, just when she was leaving her girlhood behind and emerging into a practical, sensible woman. She is so natural and truly genuine. Although her trials may represent everyday experiences, yet she meets them so nobly and with such resignation.

"Both old and young found in Molly the truest of friends, and she was always to be relied upon for sympathy in time of trouble." "'You're a real blessing to mother's child! You give one such pleasant sympathy, both in one's gladness and in one's sorrow, and in one's pride (for I was so proud last week, so confident), and in one's disappointment.'" "'Molly *is* a treasure,'" to quote Squire Hamley's postscript. It is interesting to notice that Mrs. Gaskell's immediate surroundings influenced her literary work. Whilst writing *Wives and Daughters*—which is not a good title—she was travelling on the Continent with her daughters and a party of young friends, including gentlemen. This story, which one of Mrs. Gaskell's daughters admitted was not planned beforehand, but, like *Cranford*, was written somewhat as a series of sketches, is mostly about young people, just on the threshold of manhood and womanhood. It would not

be difficult to point to a good, sensible Molly in Mrs. Gaskell's list of young friends, and there was one merry, clever young lady that, like Cynthia, was ever ready to emulate the good in others.

After the death of Mrs. Hamley, Molly is softly sobbing in the dining-room, and Cynthia finds her in the twilight. By way of consolation she tries to comfort her by asking questions, and then Molly's brave, sympathetic nature appeals to her.

"'I wish I was good!' 'So do I,' said Molly simply. She was thinking of Mrs. Hamley—

> 'Only the actions of the just
> Smell sweet and blossom in the dust,'

and 'goodness' just then seemed to her the only enduring thing in the world.

"'Nonsense, Molly! You are good. At least, if you're not good, what am I? There's a rule-of-three sum for you to do! But it's no use talking; I am not good, and I never shall be now. Perhaps I might be a heroine still, but I shall never be a good woman, I know.'"

"'Do you think it easier to be a heroine?'"

"'Yes, as far as one knows of heroines from history. I'm capable of a great jerk, an effort, and then a relaxation—but steady, everyday goodness is beyond me. I must be a moral kangaroo!'"

This is Cynthia's description of the moral side of her nature. Mrs. Gaskell always seems to present the redeeming features in her characters. "It is right to hope for the best about everybody, and not to expect the worst. This sounds like a truism, but it has comforted me before now, and some day you'll find it useful. One has always to try to think more of others than of oneself, and it is best not to prejudge people on the bad side.

" We have, all of us, our look now and then called up by some noble or loving thought (our highest on earth) which will be our likeness in heaven. I can catch the glance on many a face, the glancing light, the cloud of glory from heaven ' which is our home,' " wrote Mrs. Gaskell, when describing the hard-worked, wrinkled countenances of the Lancashire operatives.

Cynthia is a difficult character. " I'm not up to Cynthia yet," wrote Madame Mohl to Mrs. Gaskell, as *Wives and Daughters* was going through the *Cornhill*. Mrs. Gaskell has drawn her admirably ; Molly and Cynthia are a splendid study in contrasts, and show the writer's insight into human nature ; she was always more successful with her heroines than with her heroes, because she could draw from her own life, and she had the constant companionship of her own daughters, who, as they grew older, were her confidants and helpers.

" She combined both being my mother and greatest friend in a way you do not often, I think, find between mother and daughter," wrote Mrs. Gaskell's eldest daughter.

The " Wives " of the title are Mrs. Hamley and the second Mrs. Gibson. Mrs. Hamley is an invalid, and a great friend to Molly. She is not a character difficult to draw, but the Janus-like Mrs. Gibson is a masterpiece worthy of one of Mrs. Gaskell's masculine contemporaries. It has been suggested that a " statue might be erected in the market-place of Hollingford, if all the people who had been amused by Mrs. Gibson were to subscribe." If an attempt were made to carry out this suggestion, it is certain that many Knutsford people would object. Mrs. Gibson is not the type of woman that Knutsford folk love ; their prime favourite is Miss Matty Jenkyns and, after her, sweet Molly Gibson. There is a shop in the town

that is known as "Miss Matty's tea shop," as the picture postcards testify, just as there is a Molly Gibson's House. Mrs. Gaskell's saving grace of humour shows Mrs. Gibson's weaknesses without a spiteful or ungracious word. No other writer of that period could have created such a character. Mrs. Gaskell's ridicule only brings forth smiles of pity. It is in this clever portraiture that she surpasses Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot. Mrs. Gibson would have suffered cruelly under Charlotte Brontë's merciless pen, and with what scorn would George Eliot have treated her!

"Mrs. Gibson's words were always like ready-made clothes, and never fitted individual thoughts. Her conversation was often sprinkled with the sayings of her titled friends and words to set off her superficial education." . . . "'This Spring weather overcomes me, *primavera*, I think the Italians call it. But it is very trying, as much from its association as from its variableness of temperature. It makes me sigh perpetually, but, then, I am so sensitive. Dear Lady Cumnor always used to say I was like a thermometer.'"

Part of the story of *Wives and Daughters* was written in Madame Mohl's drawing-room, "the novelist standing by the fireplace and using the mantelpiece as a desk." George Sand greatly admired it, and it is said that she remarked to Lord Houghton: "*Wives and Daughters* would rivet the attention of the most *blasé* man in the world."

It was from Church House that Molly Gibson went to her first garden-party at Cumnor Towers, where the Earl and Countess held regal sway in the little country town.

"The little straggling town faded away into country on one side, close to the entrance lodge of the great park, where lived my Lord and Lady Cumnor: 'the

earl' and 'the countess,' as they were always called."

The Earl and the Countess were Lord and Lady Egerton, who lived at Tatton Park, Knutsford, in Elizabeth Stevenson's early days. Tatton Park figures as Cumnor Towers in *Wives and Daughters.*

Lord Egerton's grand-daughter says in *Cranford Souvenirs* that she remembers once paying a friendly call at Church House with her mother, so that the people at the Hall and the country surgeon's family were evidently on visiting terms. It is quite possible that Elizabeth Stevenson, as a little girl, was invited to the annual garden-party at Tatton Hall; in any case, she was quite familiar with its exterior, and the grounds, which she describes.

The late King Edward the Seventh and his consort, when Prince and Princess of Wales, stayed at Tatton Park in 1887, as the guests of the late Lord Egerton, when on a visit to Knutsford to witness the May-Day festivities. This large park, with its stately mansion, and the herd of deer browsing on the greensward, is much as it was at the time that Molly Gibson made her *début* into Hollingford Society, when she went to her first garden-party at the Towers. There are two halls in the park, which is nine miles in circumference. The great house in which the present Lord Egerton resides dates back to 1794, and is the one Mrs. Gaskell was familiar with. In the little hollow, down by the boat-house, on the bank of the stream which meanders through the park, is the old hall, which is of a much earlier date.

Mrs. Gaskell was greatly interested in the old family traditions of the most noted Cheshire families, and in a letter to a friend she asks for authentic information about the ancestors of the Egertons of Tatton.

The account of Molly Gibson's visit to Cumnor

Towers is the novelist's second attempt at introducing the aristocracy of Knutsford into her novels. Her first was in *My Lady Ludlow*, where Lady Jane Stanley figures.

In introducing the Earl and Countess of Cumnor Towers, the characters are presented in a somewhat different style. Mrs. Gaskell generally described characters whose place in life she often might have filled herself, but with the titled gentry she is telling the story of their doings and conversation as an outsider, and for that reason she is not so true to life.

However, she has got the real earl and countess of her Knutsford days well portrayed. A steward of Lord Egerton's of the Cranford days was fond of talking about his master and mistress, Lord and Lady Egerton, the earl and countess of Mrs. Gaskell's story : how his lordship would go " pottering " round his farms, criticising and advising, and—what was more difficult to put up with—altering the steward's arrangements, and substituting his own eccentric plans, and how " My lady " was the authority over the women's kingdom at Knutsford. She claimed the right, as the lady of the manor, to know the gossip of the little town, and to advise and interfere if need be, just as Mrs. Gaskell gives it in her story. Her ladyship's hobby, however, was her school. This building is near the entrance gates to Tatton Park, and, until quite recently, was used as a girls' school.

Many of the grandmothers and great-grandmothers in Knutsford owe their education to the Lady Egerton of Mrs. Gaskell's days. She prided herself on the management of her school for the poorer classes in this rural district.

" She and the ladies, her daughters, had set up a school ; not a school after the manner of schools nowadays, where far better intellectual teaching is

given to the boys and girls of labourers and work-people than often falls to the lot of their betters in worldly estate; but a school of the kind we should call 'industrial,' where girls are taught to sew beautifully, to be capital housemaids, and pretty fair cooks, and, above all, to dress neatly in a kind of charity uniform devised by the ladies of Cumnor Towers—white caps, white tippets, check aprons, blue gowns, and ready curtseys, and 'please, ma'ams' being *de rigueur*.

"Now, as the Countess was absent from the Towers for a considerable part of the year, she was glad to enlist the sympathy of the Hollingford ladies in this school, with a view to obtaining their aid as visitors during the many months that she and her daughters were away. And the various unoccupied gentlewomen of the town responded to the call of their liege lady. . . . In return, there was a day of honour set apart every summer, when, with much gracious and stately hospitality, Lady Cumnor and her daughters received all the school visitors at the Towers.

"My lady's garden-party caused great commotion amongst the Hollingford ladies, when the hall carriages went round the town to collect the favoured guests.

"Molly felt herself to be very conspicuously placed in the centre of the carriage. . . . The woman at the lodge held the gate open, and dropped a low curtsey to the liveries. And now they were in the Park; and now they were in sight of the Towers. . . .

"Green velvet lawns, bathed in sunshine, stretched away on every side into the finely-wooded park; if there were divisions and ha-has between the soft, sunny sweeps of grass, and the dark gloom of the forest trees beyond, Molly did not see them; and

the melting away of exquisite cultivation into the wilderness had an inexplicable charm for her. Near the house there were walls and fences ; but they were covered with climbing roses, and rare honeysuckles and other creepers just bursting into bloom. There were flower-beds, too, scarlet, crimson, blue, orange ; masses of blossom lying on the greensward.

"Feeling overcome by the heated atmosphere in the hot-houses, Molly was glad to escape into the open air.

"She went from one lovely spot to another, now in the open park, now in some shut-in flower-garden, where the song of the birds and the drip of the central fountain were the only sounds. . . . She saw a great, wide-spreading cedar tree upon a burst of lawn towards which she was advancing, and the black repose beneath its branches lured her thither. There was a rustic seat in the shadow ; and weary Molly sat down there, and presently fell asleep."

The Hon. Mrs. Lionel Tollemache, grand-daughter of the Lady Egerton of Mrs. Gaskell's early days, states that her mother regarded the beginning of *Wives and Daughters*, describing the garden-party, as an exact account of the garden parties given at Tatton Park to the teachers in the school, and she adds : "The garden where Molly (in the novel) fell asleep on that hot afternoon, and which was the paradise of our childhood, still charms a younger generation."

CHAPTER V

SANDLEBRIDGE

(1810–1825)

THE Farm at Sandlebridge—Family Life at Hope Farm—The Farmer-minister—The Original of Paul Manning's Father—The Hollands and Sandlebridge Farm—Visit to the Farm—Lord Clive—The Farm-house—Mrs. Gaskell's Story, *Cousin Phillis*—Mrs. Gaskell and Tennyson.

ONE of the most interesting homes associated with Mrs. Gaskell's childhood was her maternal grandfather's country house at Sandlebridge, about three miles from Knutsford. This old-fashioned house, standing a little distance from the lane, amidst the pleasant fields of this corner of the Cheshire plain, is the original of Hope Farm in *Cousin Phillis* and of Woodley, the bachelor home of Mr. Holbrook, the rejected lover of Miss Matty in *Cranford*. Mrs. Gaskell's grandfather, Samuel Holland, was not only a practical farmer, but also a land-agent, and was the friend of Josiah Wedgwood, the elder. It was Samuel Holland who, in 1802, conducted the negotiations for the purchase of Maer Hall, the family seat of Josiah Wedgwood, the elder, in Staffordshire.

The Hollands were originally a Lancashire family, who owned lands and houses in different parts of Cheshire. The old farm-house at Sandlebridge was the early home of the novelist's own mother and also of her aunt Lumb. There also lived her aunt, Abigail Holland, who was devoted to her little motherless niece.

As a baby, Elizabeth Stevenson was taken to Sandlebridge by her aunt for periodical visits, and when old enough to run about she found delight in

wandering over the old farm, visiting the animals, and chatting with the trustworthy farm servants, some of whom have served her as such excellent types of faithful service. When Elizabeth was only six years old, her grandfather Holland died on May 26th, 1816, aged eighty-two, so that the quaint sayings attributed to him in *Cousin Phillis* may not all be from her recollections, but were probably retailed to her by her uncles and aunts. After Samuel Holland's death, the farm was kept on by one of his sons, and to his home the little Elizabeth was always welcome. Her grandmother Holland had died on July 16th, 1814, aged seventy-four, and consequently Elizabeth was too young to have many personal recollections of her.

As she grew older, the quiet, imaginative girl frequently sat, book in hand, by the old mill, day-dreaming, or watching the blacksmith at the forge, down the little lane leading from the farm. Here she shared the delight of "corn harvest following on haymaking and the apple-gathering on corn harvest." There it was that she gathered the material for the delightful story of *Cousin Phillis*. The house is still standing, much the same as it was when Elizabeth Stevenson revelled in its quiet beauty and comforting homeliness; the old water-mill and the pond are there, with the same friendly shade from the old trees under which the novelist used to rest after her country rambles or the exhilarating rides on her uncle's pony.

Cousin Phillis is the most perfect gem in Mrs. Gaskell's *répertoire* of short stories. Like *Cranford*, it is a veritable water-colour painting in warm but subdued tints, all so natural, simple and true to life. Sandlebridge is worthy of the setting which Mrs. Gaskell has given it in her novels.

The story of this pious household charms succeeding

OLD FORGE, SANDLEBRIDGE

generations by its descriptions of methodical and practical everyday life, all so unostentatious, quiet and dutiful. Religious observances are part of the daily routine, and come round just as regularly as the meal-times. In the realm of English literature it would be difficult to find a picture to equal this exquisite blending of a truly religious spirit with the ordinary, everyday work of life. The narrator, Paul Manning, tells how Farmer Holman gave directions to the farm servants concerning their work for the following day.

"Then, suddenly changing the tone of his deep bass voice to an odd suggestion of chapels and preachers, he added, 'Now, I will give out the Psalm, "Come all harmonious tongues," to be sung to "Mount Ephraim" tune.'

"He lifted his spade in his hand, and began to beat time with it; the two labourers seemed to know both words and music, though I did not; and so did Phillis: her rich voice followed her father's as he set the tune; and the men came in with more uncertainty, but still harmoniously. Phillis looked at me once or twice with a little surprise at my silence; but I did not know the words. There we five stood, bareheaded, excepting Phillis, in the tawny stubble-field, from which all the shocks of corn had not yet been carried —a dark wood on one side, where the wood-pigeons were cooing; blue distance seen through the ash trees on the other. Somehow, I think that if I had known the words, and could have sung, my throat would have been choked up by the feeling of the unaccustomed scene. The hymn was ended, and the men had drawn off before I could stir. I saw the minister beginning to put on his coat, and looking at me with friendly inspection in his gaze before I could rouse myself.

" 'I daresay you railway gentlemen don't wind up the day with singing a psalm together,' said he; 'but it is not a bad practice—not a bad practice. We have had it a bit earlier to-day for hospitality's sake—that's all.' "

Commenting on this description, Mr. Frederick Greenwood wrote: " It is not excelled as a picture in all modern fiction . . . there is no 'material' for the ordinary novel-maker in half-a-dozen farming men singing hymns in a field . . . but it is just in such things as these that true genius appears brightest and most unapproachable."

The beautiful simplicity of the faith as shown by the farmer-minister in his household is based on the facts of Samuel Holland's life. One of his grandchildren, Sir Henry Holland, who came into possession of Sandlebridge later, writes of " the tranquil pleasure of visiting at the old farm, and the remembrance of his grandfather walking cheerfully over his fields or tranquilly smoking his pipe in an arm-chair coeval with himself."

Mrs. Gaskell writes of the family worship, in which, when a girl, she sometimes joined:

" As soon as supper was done, the household assembled for prayer. It was a long, impromptu evening prayer; and it would have seemed desultory enough had I not had a glimpse of the kind of day that preceded it, and so been able to find a clue to the thoughts that preceded the disjointed utterances; for he kept there kneeling down in the centre of a circle, his eyes shut, his outstretched hands pressed palm to palm—sometimes with a long pause of silence, as if waiting to see if there was anything else he wished to 'lay before the Lord' (to use his own expression)—before he concluded with the blessing. He prayed for the cattle and live creatures, rather to my

surprise ; for my attention had begun to wander, till it was recalled by the familiar words.

" And here I must not forget to name an odd incident at the conclusion of the prayer, and before we had risen from our knees (indeed, before Betty was well awake, for she made a nightly practice of having a sound nap, her weary head lying on her stalwart arms) ; the minister, still kneeling in our midst, but with his eyes wide open, and his arms dropped by his side, spoke to the elder man, who turned round on his knees to attend. ' John, didst see that Daisy had her warm mash to-night ? for we must not neglect the means, John—two quarts of gruel, a spoonful of ginger, and a gill of beer—the poor beast needs it, and I fear it slipped out of my mind to tell thee ; and here was I asking a blessing and neglecting the means, which is a mockery,' said he, dropping his voice."

The originals of the farmer-minister are undoubtedly the novelist's grandfather and her own father, thus forming a composite picture. In the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth century, Dissenting ministers often combined preaching with some other occupation or profession. Many were schoolmasters or private tutors, others were chemists, secretaries, journalists, or clerks ; but the combination of farmer and preacher was suggested by Elizabeth Stevenson's own father.

There is much of the life of the novelist's grandfather written in *Cousin Phillis*. The books mentioned are those which were to be found in the farm at Sandlebridge. " A set of shelves, with old divinity books upon them ; another smaller, filled with books on farriery, farming, manures, and such subjects, with pieces of paper containing memoranda stuck against the whitewashed walls, with wafers, nails, pins, anything that came readiest to hand ; a box of carpenter's

tools on the floor, and some manuscripts in shorthand on the desk." The authors quoted later were her own father's favourites, including Dante and Virgil. The dutiful, affectionate daughter who kept the Latin lessons for the evenings, so that she and her father could have time to enjoy them was surely Elizabeth Stevenson herself. She owed her love of the classics to her father.

The characters in the home at Hope Farm are well drawn and typical of the serious, earnest, industrious life of many Dissenters in the early part of the nineteenth century. Here is a picture of this little household of the farmer-preacher, with the good, domesticated wife, who admired and obeyed her husband, with all the eighteenth-century woman's simple faith in the man as the head of the home and as necessarily the superior creature, and the unsophisticated daughter, with her filial love and devotion to her parents—the only living child of this truly religious couple.

In this delightful story—as in some of Mrs. Gaskell's other tales—there is a pathetic reference to her dead boy. In answer to Cousin Paul's questions, the mother replies, " She is our only child now." " Either from that *now* or from a strange, momentary wistfulness in her eyes, I knew that there had been more children, who were now dead," says the narrator.

Mrs. Gaskell repeatedly brings in this mother's yearning love for her children that have died. It was based on her own sad experience in the loss of her only son.

Phillis is a type of character that Mrs. Gaskell loved to draw. She is much like Molly Gibson in *Wives and Daughters*, and Margaret Hale in *North and South*—a pure, good English maiden, endowed with sound, common sense, domesticated, well-educated, refined; indeed, a true lady, with a natural

and inherited love of learning, and yet fascinating and human. All these qualities were possessed by Elizabeth Stevenson from what is known of her career as daughter, wife, mother and friend; and in *Cousin Phillis* may be traced some of the novelist's early history.

Paul Manning and Mr. Holdsworth, the engineer, are suggested by the fact that just about the time of the writing of the story, a railway was being laid through Knutsford, which was completed in 1862. In the story, Knutsford appears as Eltham. *Cousin Phillis* was published in the *Cornhill Magazine* from February, 1863, to November, 1864. Mrs. Gaskell and her children paid many visits to Knutsford in the days when the railway was in course of construction.

One of the minor characters in *Cousin Phillis* is Paul Manning's father, the engineer. The original was Mr. James Nasmyth, the clever Scotch engineer, who invented the steam-hammer in 1839 and many other wonderful mechanical instruments. He also investigated many problems connected with astronomy, and traced the origin of the shape of the Pyramids. His life was written, in 1891, by Dr. Smiles, and it reads like "the wonderful stories of subservient genii in the *Arabian Nights*," as Mr. Hale said to John Thornton in *North and South*, when referring to this engineer.

He was a genius in the engineering world, and his inventions, which were shown at the Great International Exhibition in 1851, attracted the notice of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. When a royal visit was paid to Manchester in October, 1851, the Queen and the Prince asked their host, the Earl of Ellesmere, to send for Mr. Nasmyth, in order to see some of his drawings. He had a large foundry at Patricroft, Manchester, and towards the close of his business career he found it necessary to have a partner.

Through the help of a friend, he found a very energetic and suitable co-worker in one of the Gaskell family, a Mr. Holbrook Gaskell, of Liverpool. The partnership was continued for sixteen years, the great Bridgewater Foundry, in Manchester, being controlled by Nasmyth & Gaskell.

Mr. Nasmyth and his wife were frequent visitors at Plymouth Grove, and both Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were keenly interested in the work of the inventor. Such a genius as Nasmyth was not likely to escape the novelist's observation. The difficulty probably would be to keep him out of a story, for he was just the type of man that a writer would hail with delight.

The readers are first introduced to this distinguished engineer in *North and South,* where Mr. Thornton explains to Mr. Hale the magnificent power, yet delicate adjustment of the might of the steam-hammer. "And this imagination of power, this practical realisation of a gigantic thought, came out of one man's brain in our good town. That very man has it within him to mount, step by step, on each wonder he achieves to higher marvels still. And I'll be bound to say, we have many among us who, if he were gone, could spring into the breach and carry on the war which compels, and shall compel, all material power to yield to science."

In *Cousin Phillis* Mr. Nasmyth figures as Paul Manning's father. "'You've a clear, good head of your own, my lad—choose how you came by it.'

"'From my father,' said I, proudly. 'Have you not heard of his discovery of a new method of shunting? It was in the *Gazette.* It was patented. I thought everyone had heard of Manning's patent winch.'

"'We don't know who invented the alphabet,' said he (Mr. Holman), half smiling, and taking up his pipe.

" 'No, I dare say not, sir,' replied I, half offended ; 'that's so long ago.'

"Puff—puff—puff.

" 'But your father must be a notable man. I heard of him once before ; and it is not many a one fifty miles away whose fame reaches Heathbridge.'

" 'My father is a notable man, sir. It is not me that says so ; it is Mr. Holdsworth, and—and everybody.'"

Samuel Smiles, in his biography of James Nasmyth, mentions that the engineer was more interested in hand-and-eye training than mere book knowledge. He believed that the eyes and the fingers—the bare fingers, as he was fond of saying—were the chief means to sound, practical instruction. The nature and properties of materials must come through the finger ends, and so he had no faith in engineers who were in the habit of wearing gloves. " Gloves, especially kid gloves, are perfect non-conductors of technical knowledge."

Mrs. Gaskell refers to this question of gloves in *Cousin Phillis :*

" Mr. Holdsworth and my father had many mutual jokes about one of these gentlemen-apprentices, who used to set about his smith's work in white wash-leather gloves, for fear of spoiling his hands." And the description of Paul's father is true to the letter : " My father, in his decent but unfashionable Sunday clothes, his plain, sensible face, full of hard lines—the marks of toil and thought—his hands blackened beyond the power of soap and water by years of labour in the foundry, speaking a strong Northern dialect."

To those who knew Mr. Nasmyth in the " fifties," when he was working out his patents at the Bridgewater foundry in Manchester, the original of Mr. Manning is easily recognised. This famous engineer

is mentioned in *Memorials of Two Sisters*, by Margaret J. Shaen, in which she tells of her aunt, Catherine Winkworth, meeting Mr. Nasmyth at the Gaskells' home in Plymouth Grove, Manchester, afterwards going with them to the foundry at Patricroft and having a lesson in geology from Mr. Nasmyth, who was in the habit of illustrating his remarks by diagrams drawn on the wall with his sooty finger.

This method of demonstrating his point was used at the first meeting of the farmer-preacher and Paul's father at Hope Farm, and it is a recorded fact that Mr. Manning's inventive faculty was busy, whilst he walked over the farm land, " occasionally taking up an implement, as if unconsciously, and examining it with a critical eye, and now and then asking a question, which I could see was considered as pertinent by his companion." . . . " He had his little book that he used for mechanical memoranda and measurements in his pocket, and he took it out to write down : ' straight back, small muzzle, deep barrel.'." . . . " He was very critical on a turnip-cutting machine, the clumsiness of which first incited him to talk ; and when we went into the house he sat thinking and quiet for a bit.

" After tea, I heard an irrepressible exclamation from Cousin Holman—' Whatever is the man about ! ' And, on looking round, I saw my father taking a straight burning stick out of the fire, and, after waiting for a minute, and examining the charred end to see if it was fitted for his purpose, he went to the hard wood dresser, scoured to the last pitch of whiteness and cleanliness, and began drawing with the stick, the best substitute for chalk or charcoal within his reach, for his pocket-book pencil was not strong or bold enough for his purpose. When he had done, he began to explain his new model of a turnip-cutting

machine to the minister, who had been watching him in silence all the time. Cousin Holman had, in the meantime, taken a duster out of the drawer, and, under pretence of being as much interested as her husband in the drawing, was secretly trying on an outside mark how easily it would come off, and whether it would leave her dresser as white as before."

In his autobiography, Mr. Nasmyth refers to his Scheme Book, "on the pages of which I generally thought out, with the aid of pen and pencil, such mechanical adaptations as I had conceived in my mind and was thereby enabled to render them visible."

Sandlebridge came into the possession of the Holland family through Samuel Holland's wife, Ann Colthurst, daughter of Peter and Elizabeth Colthurst, whose virtues are recorded on an old tombstone in the graveyard at Brook Street Chapel, Knutsford:

"This Stone over the Remains
of **Peter Colthurst** of Sandlebridge,
who died June **16, 1741**, aged **72**,
And of **Elizabeth** his Wife,
who died June **15, 1740**, aged **74**.
In His Mind were assembled
all the Virtues, which rendered Him
Happy in Himself, usefull to the World,
an Ornament to human Nature.
She was truly worthy of such an Husband
in all Goodness, a kind Assistant
and generous Rival.
Their lives were stained with no Dishonour
but Piety and universal Benevolence
recommended Them to the Friendship
of the Wise and Good.
And those valued Them most
who knew Them best
The Bad avoided Them
except they wanted Relief."

The name Colthurst is still associated with the old mill close to the farm, on which is an inscription: "M.S.C. 1659." The mill is still known as Colthurst or Colter's Mill. The Hollands no longer live at the farm; it is now let to strangers, and the estate is partly covered by the buildings connected with the homes for the epileptic colony that was founded by the Lewis Trustees in 1899.

Pilgrims to the Gaskell shrine at Knutsford should not fail to visit Sandlebridge. It is a pleasant walk of about three miles, and may also be approached from Chelford Station on the London and North-Western Railway. The walk from this station is delightful. Passing through the Sandlebridge fields by a narrow, well-worn path, a visitor might almost expect to meet Cousin Phillis in her blue cotton gown and sun-bonnet. The old men around this sequestered spot still have the habit of walking meditatively, with their hands behind their back, as described in *Cousin Phillis;* and in answer to questions of inquiry as to the way to the farm, the same gracious manners and ready courtesy, of which the novelist's Cheshire stories are redolent, still cling to the people.

Coming in sight of the Homes for Epileptics, built in this breezy upland, and looking across to the well-wooded hill of Alderley Edge, now a residential suburb of Manchester, the stranger realises that the country is changing under the hand of the builder. A little further, and Sandlebridge is seen. Is this the "five acre field"? or does the mountain ash tree under which the cows are resting proclaim it the "ash field," as mentioned by Mrs. Gaskell? Pass through a swing gate from these pleasant fields, and Hope Farm is in view. There it is, just as described in *Cousin Phillis* forty-seven years ago and earlier still in *Cranford.* The novelist says: "There was a garden

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between the house and the shady, grassy lane; I afterwards found that this garden was called the court; perhaps because there was a low wall round it, with an iron railing on the top of the wall, and two great gates between pillars crowned with stone balls for a state entrance to the flagged path leading up to the front door. It was not the habit of the place to go in either by these great gates or by the front door; the gates, indeed, were locked, as I found, though the door stood wide open. I had to go round by a side-path lightly worn on a broad, grassy way, which led past the court-wall, past a horse-mount, half covered with stone-crop and the little wild fumitory, to another door—'the curate,' as I found it was termed by the master of the house, while the front door, 'handsome and all for show,' was termed the 'rector.'"

The iron railing has gone and also the large stone balls that surmounted the red brick pedestals on either side of the gate. It would be interesting to be able to trace them to their destination, for these stone balls have historic associations with the great Lord Clive, whose mother was a Gaskell, daughter of Nathaniel Gaskell, of Manchester. She married a Richard Clive, and their son Robert was sent to a school at Knutsford, "where he received almost the first rudiments of his education." The master, Dr. Eaton, was also the minister at the old Presbyterian chapel. He was a man who combined learning with considerable discrimination, and he did not fail to discover in his young pupil the germs of that greatness which afterwards became so evident to all the world. "If," said he, "that lad should live to be a man, and an opportunity be given for the exertion of his talents, few names will be greater than his."

During young Clive's residence in Knutsford, he spent many half-holidays at Sandlebridge Farm; and

it is said that he proved his subsequent capabilities by daring exploits, amusing himself and alarming his relatives by jumping from one stone ball on the gate-post to the other. Another Knutsford tradition tells of a feud between Dr. Eaton's scholars and a miller in the neighbourhood. These mischievous school-boys attempted to build a dam across the little stream that supplied the mill; but failing to form a foundation, young Clive lay across the brook and with his own body made a coffer dam, against which the bank of sods might rest; the work was completed, and the brook stopped in its course; only for a short time, indeed, yet long enough to satisfy their wish for a schoolboy freak.

These stories coincide with the one told of Clive when living at Market Drayton in 1740, when he alarmed the inhabitants by climbing a high steeple, in order to extract a stone from the mouth of a gargoyle. Mrs. Gaskell makes use of this incident in the story about Uriah Hanbury and Monsieur de Créquy in *My Lady Ludlow*.

The narrow path, "which is meant to save the broad, flagged approach to the front or state entrance" to the farm is still there, and the front door is even now without a knocker or a bell, just as when little Elizabeth Stevenson visited her grandfather. The wide hall is covered with well-worn, diamond-shaped flags. On the right is the parlour, with two narrow casement windows, which call to mind Cousin Paul's first visit when the parlour was used in his honour. To the left is the dining-room or house place. The old oak shuffle-board is gone, and with it departed the Holland family, though it is still kept by them as an heirloom in one of the family homes. There are few of these old oak shuffle-boards left, though Cheshire clung to them perhaps longer than most other counties.

They were used as a playing-board for a game which consisted in jerking heavy weights or "counters" along an inclined plane into spaces reserved for them at the end of the table. Underneath were useful drawers. There is a good specimen of an old shuffle-board in the New Place Museum at Shakespeare's old house in Stratford-on-Avon.

Mounting the shallow, oaken stairs, which Mrs. Gaskell mentions as never having known a carpet, one can see places where some of the old oak panelling has been covered over, and there is evidence, also, of some of the panelling having been removed. Possibly some member of the Holland family cherishes it in his own home. There are fourteen bedrooms, some opening into each other, but none seems to be known as the "Gaskell" room. In many of the houses where Charlotte Brontë stayed as a visitor, the bedroom used by her has afterwards been known as the "Brontë" room.

At the top of the house is a large room, littered with straw, used at times as a storehouse for late apples. Readers will remember Cousin Phillis going up to the apple-room to cover the fruit as a protection against frost. Elizabeth Stevenson enjoyed her visits to this roomy, old house, which she has set in such a beautiful picture at Heathbridge, the village in which Hope Farm was situated. The large farm kitchen brings to mind Parson Holman saying grace: "Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, let us do all to the glory of God." And we remember "the rap of the buck-horn carving knife and the master of the house saying, 'Now or never,' and the double knock for Betty to change the plates."

Passing out by the "rector" door into the garden, the visitor is reminded of the novelist's favourite flower—the saxifrage.

It is difficult to believe that her story was written forty-six years ago; everything seems so like the picture she drew, and the old-world place has changed so little.

Standing by the old Colthurst mill and hearing the rhythmic splash of the water, we are reminded of her who has immortalised the spot. A walk through the farmyard and past the old barns and sheds recalls the picture of Cousin Phillis in the happy days, just shyly conscious of her love for Holdsworth, and having been told by her Cousin Paul that he returned her love.

The novelist gives a beautiful picture of this serenely happy maiden: "I never saw her so lovely or so happy. I think she hardly knew why she was so happy all the time. I can see her now, standing under the budding branches of the grey trees, over which a tinge of green seemed to be deepening day after day, her sun-bonnet fallen back on her neck, her hands full of delicate wood-flowers, quite unconscious of my gaze, but intent on sweet mockery of some bird in neighbouring bush or tree. She had the art of warbling and replying to the notes of different birds, and knew their songs, their habits and ways more accurately than anyone else I ever knew.

"She had often done it at my request the spring before; but this year she really gurgled and whistled and warbled just as they did, out of the very fulness and joy of her heart."

Passing through the orchard, the visitor looks for the great stack of wood, under which poor, lonely Phillis poured out her grief on that cold 26th of December of long ago. "She was sitting on a log of wood, Rover by her. She had laid her cheek on Rover's head, and had her arm round his neck, partly for a pillow, partly from an instinctive craving for warmth, on that bitter, cold day. She was making a

low moan, like an animal in pain, or perhaps more like the sobbing of the wind." Here Paul finds her. This picture is worthy to be placed side by side with the one where Roger Hamley finds Molly Gibson sobbing her heart out against the tree in the garden when she first hears the sad news of her father's second marriage.

Mrs. Gaskell makes her readers sympathise with her heroines; the griefs and trials are so real, so pathetic, that they appear to be the result of actual experience.

Like all Mrs. Gaskell's stories, *Cousin Phillis* leaves one the better for having read it. All the characters at the farm are so captivating. Cousin Paul, the narrator, is somewhat commonplace, but he serves to bring out the good qualities of his relatives; and Holdsworth gives the sharp contrast which alters the even current of the regular life at the farm. It is too good to be spoilt, and so Phillis is not allowed to die of her disappointed passion. Like the good, sensible creature she is, she comes through chastened, but not entirely crushed.

The old servants are never overlooked. The novelist, like Scott and Ian Maclaren, was ever appreciative, and quite familiar with the best type of servant maid.

Betty, the familiar servant of Mrs. Gaskell's stories, is a character from life, for she had the quaint Cheshire dialect and the brusque familiarity which North Country servants are noted for. The family welfare was safe in her keeping, and right well did she guard the good name of her employers.

Cousin Paul "gets the wind taken out of his sails," when Betty accosts him, and he is made to feel that her honour and respect for Phillis are much above his own. "'Poor lad! You're but a big child after all; and you've likely never heared of a fever-flush. . . . If yon friend o' yours has played her false, he's

a deal for t'answer for; she's a lass who's as sweet and as sound as a nut, and the very apple of her father's eye, and of her mother's too, only wi' her she ranks second to th' minister. You'll have to look after yon chap, for I, for one, will stand no wrong to our Phillis.' "

And again: " 'You great gaupus, for all you're called cousin o' th' minister—many a one is cursed wi' fools for cousins—d'ye think I can't see sense except through your spectacles? I give you leave to cut out my tongue, and nail it up on the barn-door for a caution to magpies, if I let out on that poor wench, either to herself or any one that is hers, as the Bible says. Now you've heard me speak Scripture language, perhaps you'll be content and leave me my kitchen to myself.' "

The plain-speaking Betty knows no fear, and even those whom she loves and is ready to fight for do not escape, if she thinks her words are necessary. Her practical advice to Phillis, as she lies limp and ill, after the fever caused by her grief and disappointment on her brief love episode, answers its purpose, though not couched in the most agreeable terms.

" 'Now, Phillis,' says Betty, coming up to the sofa, 'we ha' done a' we can for you, and th' doctors has done a' they can for you, and I think the Lord has done a' He can for you, and more than you deserve, too, if you don't do something for yourself. If I were you, I'd rise up and snuff the moon, sooner than break your father's and your mother's heart wi' watching and waiting till it pleases you to fight your own way back to cheerfulness. There, I never favoured long preachings, and I've said my say.' "

Mrs. Gaskell gives a faithful description of Woodley in *Cranford*. It was on the occasion of Miss Matty's first and last visit to her old lover—the

bachelor farmer, Mr. Holbrook. She and the inquisitive Miss Pole and the narrator drive from Cranford to Woodley on this memorable visit, and as they draw near, Miss Matty looks wistfully out of the windows of the carriage.

" The aspect of the country was quiet and pastoral. Woodley stood among fields, and there was an old-fashioned garden where roses and currant bushes touched each other, and where the feathery asparagus found a pretty background to the pinks and the gilly-flowers ; there was no drive to the door. We got out at a little gate and walked up a straight, box-edged path."

It was here that Farmer Holman read *Locksley Hall* to Miss Matty and her friends. Mrs. Gaskell was well acquainted with Tennyson's poems, and she frequently selected choice quotations from them. He was the only great writer of the Victorian era that she had not met, and yet she was once actually in a house on the Continent, where he was staying in the room above hers, without knowing until afterwards, much to her lasting regret.

The following lines of Tennyson's, written in Mrs. Gaskell's beautiful, clear handwriting, were once given to a friend as the novelist's favourite quotation :

" Oh yet we trust that somehow good
Will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;

" That nothing walks with aimless feet ;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete."

—*In Memoriam.*

(Signed) E. C. GASKELL,
April 10th, 1858.

CHAPTER VI

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

(1825–1827)

ELIZABETH STEVENSON leaves Knutsford—The Byerleys—Journey from Knutsford to Hanbury Court—Hanbury Court—*My Lady Ludlow*—School Life at Avonbank—Daily Work at School—Influence of School Life—Humour in *My Lady Ludlow*—Memorial to Miss Byerley—Mrs. Gaskell's First Literary Effort—Visit to Clopton House—*Lois the Witch.*

TOWARDS the end of 1825, Elizabeth Stevenson, when about fifteen years of age, was sent to a boarding-school, kept by the Misses Byerley at Stratford-on-Avon. Here she remained for two years, including holidays. This school was chosen because the Misses Byerley were well known to the Wedgwoods, the Hollands, and the Stevensons as women of high character and capable teachers.

Thomas Byerley, the father of the ladies who kept the school, was a relative and partner of Josiah Wedgwood, the famous potter. For fifteen years, from the death of Josiah Wedgwood in 1795, he was the manager of the works at Etruria in Staffordshire, and also of the London branch of the firm. He lived for a time in Sloane Street, Chelsea.

Mr. Byerley had a large family of fourteen children, seven being daughters, all of whom received a superior education. He had much domestic anxiety, and was far from being a wealthy man. Writing to Josiah, son of the elder Wedgwood, in January, 1808, Mr. Byerley says of one of his daughters: "Fanny is one of the best of human beings, considerate and prudent, but you will fancy the father speaks and not

the man. She knows our situation, she has prepared herself to take two of her younger sisters, finish their education, and take care of Josiah's [her brother's] housekeeping." The four daughters who managed the school were Maria, Jane, Ann, and Fanny; but the most noted sister was Catherine Byerley, who became an author, and in 1820 married Dr. Anthony Todd Thomson, a brother of Mr. Stevenson's second wife.

Mrs. Gaskell gives an account of her schooldays in *My Lady Ludlow*, of which she says: "It is no story and has neither beginning, middle, nor end." It was first published as a serial in *Household Words* from June to September, 1858, and was in the following year included in a volume of short stories published by Messrs. Sampson Low & Co., under the title of *Round the Sofa*. In 1860 it was translated into French by Mme. H. Loreau. The character of Lady Ludlow is based partly upon the eccentric Lady Jane Stanley, of Knutsford, but the novelist has also utilised the character of Miss Byerley, the principal of the school.

One of the sisters, Mrs. Coltman, who was a widow, figures as Mrs. Medlicott, the housekeeper at Hanbury Court, the name under which the school, Avonbank, appears in the story.

Elizabeth Stevenson retained an affectionate regard for Mrs. Coltman, and she says in the story: "Mrs. Medlicott was great as a nurse, and I am sure I can never be grateful enough to her memory for all her kindness. But she was puzzled to know how to manage me in other ways. I used to have long, hard fits of crying—thinking that I ought to go home—and yet, what could they do with me there?—and a hundred and fifty other anxious thoughts, some of which I could tell to Mrs. Medlicott, and others I

could not. Her way of comforting me was hurrying off for some kind of tempting or strengthening food—a basin of melted calves'-foot jelly was, I am sure she thought, a cure for every woe.

"'There! take it, dear, take it!' she would say; 'and don't go on fretting for what can't be helped.'"

There were generally about forty pupils in the school, including six boarders, all "gentlewomen of good birth." Elizabeth Stevenson, who in the story figures as Margaret Dawson, was invited by Lady Ludlow to fill the vacancy caused by the death of one of the boarders.

"I see that letter now; a large sheet of thick yellow paper, with a straight broad margin left on the left-hand side of the delicate Italian writing. . . .

"My mother dropped the letter and sat silent.

"'I shall not know what to do without you, Margaret.'

"A moment before, like a young untried girl as I was, I had been pleased at the notion of seeing a new place and leading a new life. But now—my mother's look of sorrow, and the children's cry of remonstrance. 'Mother, I won't go,' I said.

"'Nay! but you had better,' replied she, shaking her head. 'Lady Ludlow has much power. . . It will not do to slight her offer.'"

The novelist had an excellent memory, and the different changes in her early life made a deep impression. *My Lady Ludlow* was written more than thirty years after she went to Stratford-on-Avon.

Her experience of school life was very different from Charlotte Brontë's. She was with friends of her own family, who took a keen interest in the pupil who afterwards brought so much credit to her old school, though, unfortunately, the principal of the school was dead before Mrs. Gaskell became known as an

author—except for the short account of Clopton House, which appeared, in 1840, in William Howitt's *Visits to Remarkable Places*.

Several of Maria Byerley's sisters were living when *Mary Barton* was published, and were able to rejoice in the success of their former pupil, when she became known as a distinguished writer.

Beyond a few visits to her father in Chelsea, Elizabeth Stevenson had not been far from Knutsford before she was fifteen years of age. Writing of this journey to school in 1825, she says: "Things are very different to what they were in my youth. Then we, who travelled, travelled in coaches, carrying six inside, and making a two-days' journey out of what people now go over in a couple of hours with a whizz and a flash, and a screaming whistle enough to deafen one."

Evidently she travelled alone from Knutsford to Stratford-on-Avon, stopping with friends of her family in Birmingham for one night. An account of that journey and the night amongst strangers is related in one of her ghost stories, where she tells of her journey to school at Dunchurch, by stage-coach, and of her staying at Birmingham with a Quaker couple for one night.

"I was to be put in charge of the guard of the coach as far as Birmingham, where a friend of my father's was to meet me, and take me to sleep at his house. . . . The coach rumbled into an inn-yard, and I was wakened out of my sleep by someone popping in . . . and asking if Hannah Johnson was there? . . . Well! I was soon bundled, more asleep than awake, into a gig; and my luggage was all stowed away till morning. . . . . We had a drive of two miles, out of the very thick of the town into a sort of suburb on a hill side. . . . A woman Friend came to the steps, with a candle in

her hand, to meet us. . . . She made me take off my shoes ; felt my stockings to see if they were wet ; then she hurried tea, to which I remember I had no sugar, because of the slave trade, which many good people were then striving to put down. . . . I put my feet into hot water—though I would rather have gone straight to bed—because my kind hostess urged it ; and then it was found out I had left my carpet-bag at the inn ; so I had to wait till a night-gown and night-cap of hers was aired. And at last I tumbled into bed." Then follows an unfinished account of the figure of a woman who sat in an easy chair by the head of the bed, rocking a baby backwards and forwards, and the fright of the little traveller. " The lady rose and I dropped the curtain, and . . ."

The latter part of Elizabeth Stevenson's journey from Knutsford to her new home at Stratford-on-Avon can be read in her story of *My Lady Ludlow :*

" I remember well the afternoon of my arrival at Hanbury Court. Her ladyship had sent to meet me at the nearest post-town at which the mail-coach stopped. There was an old groom enquiring for me, the ostler said, if my name was Dawson—from Hanbury Court, he believed. I felt it rather formidable ; and first began to understand what was meant by going among strangers, when I lost sight of the guard to whom my mother had entrusted me. I was perched up in a high gig with a hood to it, such as in those days was called a chair, and my companion was driving deliberately through the most pastoral country I had ever yet seen. By-and-bye we ascended a long hill, and the man got out and walked at the horse's head. I should have liked to walk, too, very much indeed ; but I did not know how far I might do it ; and, in fact, I dared not speak to ask to be helped

down the deep steps of the gig. We were at last at the top—on a long, breezy, sweeping, unenclosed piece of ground, called, as I afterwards learnt, a Chase. The groom stopped, breathed, patted his horse, and then mounted again to my side.

" 'Are we near Hanbury Court ? ' I asked.

" ' Near ! Why, Miss ! we've a matter of ten miles yet to go.'

" Once launched into conversation, we went on pretty glibly. I fancy he had been afraid of beginning to speak to me, just as I was to him ; but he got over his shyness with me sooner than I did mine with him. I let him choose the subjects of conversation, although very often I could not understand the points of interest in them ; for instance, he talked for more than a quarter of an hour of a famous race which a certain dog-fox had given him, above thirty years before ; and spoke of all the curves and turns just as if I knew them as well as he did ; and all the time I was wondering what kind of an animal a dog-fox might be.

" After we left the Chase, the road grew worse. No one in these days who has not seen the by-roads of fifty years ago, can imagine what they were. We had to quarter, as Randal called it, nearly all the way down the deep-rutted, miry lanes ; and the tremendous jolts I occasionally met with made my seat in the gig so unsteady, that I could not look about me at all. I was so much occupied in holding on. The road was too muddy for me to walk without dirtying myself more than I liked to do, just before my first sight of Lady Ludlow. But by-and-bye, when we came to the fields in which the lane ended, I begged Randal to help me down, as I saw that I could pick my steps among the pasture grass without making myself unfit to be seen ; and Randal, out of pity for his steaming

horse, wearied with the hard struggle through the mud, thanked me kindly, and helped me down with a springing jump." . . . Suddenly we came to a long flight of steps.

"'If you'll run down there, miss, I'll go round and meet you; and then you'd better mount again, for my lady will like to see you drive up to the house.'

. . . "I went down the steps quickly enough. I met Randal and the gig at the bottom; and, falling into a side road to the left, we drove sedately round, through the gateway, and into the great court in front of the house."

Mrs. Gaskell gives a detailed description of Hanbury Court, which is evidently based on the old house of St. Mary, on the bank of the Avon, her home for two happy years.

"I am unwilling to leave, even in thought, the haunts of such happy days as my school days were," wrote the novelist, when giving particulars of the interesting places around Stratford-on-Avon.

"Hanbury Court is a vast red-brick house—at least, it is cased in part with red bricks; and the gate-house and walls about the place are of brick—with stone facings at every corner, and door and window, such as you see at Hampton Court. At the back are the gables, and arched doorways and stone mullions, which show (so Lady Ludlow used to tell us) that it was once a priory. There was a prior's parlour, I know, only we called it Mrs. Medlicott's room; and there was a tithe-barn as big as a church, and rows of fish ponds, all got ready for the monks' fasting-days in old time. But all this I did not see till afterwards. I hardly noticed, this first night, the great Virginian creeper (said to have been the first planted in England by one of my lady's ancestors), that half covered the house.

"As I had been unwilling to leave the guard of the coach, so did I now feel unwilling to leave Randal, a known friend of three hours. But there was no help for it; in I must go; past the grand-looking old gentleman holding the door open for me, on into the great hall on the right hand, into which the sun's last rays were sending glorious red light—the gentleman was now walking before me—up a step on to the dais, as I afterwards learned that it was called—then again to the left, through a series of sitting-rooms, opening one out of another, and all of them looking into a stately garden, glowing, even in the twilight, with the bloom of flowers."

This old school-house of Avonbank, which was demolished in 1866, was once the home of Shakespeare for a short time about 1602, and previous to that it was known as the House of St. Mary. As far back as the beginning of the fifteenth century, this house had been used as a school, and previous to that, it had been the residence of some of the monks of Worcester, as the manor belonged to the Benedictine monastery of that place.

In the "Guild accounts" at Stratford-on-Avon, this ancient building is referred to as "The House of St. Mary in 'le Oldtown,' A.D. 1412–1413. The Master of the Guild was allowed 4s. annual rent to the schoolmaster as long as he kept a school in the House of St. Mary."

In the year 1602 this residence was owned by Thomas Greene, Shakespeare's cousin, who was Town Clerk of Stratford-on-Avon.

It is mentioned in Greene's *Diary*, where he states that William Shakespeare was contemplating settling down in Stratford-on-Avon, and was obliged to make temporary arrangement for staying at his cousin's house by the river until his tenant's lease at New

Place had expired. Other entries in the diary refer to the rebuilding of a wall between Greene's property and the churchyard, which proves that the House of St. Mary was the one owned by Greene.

Langbain, in his *Lives of the Poets*, published about 1699, says of Shakespeare : " I have been told that he writ the Scene of the Ghost in *Hamlet* at his house which bordered on the Charnel House and Churchyard." The Charnel House was on the north side of Shakespeare's Church.

It is evident from *My Lady Ludlow* that Mrs. Gaskell knew the history of this house, for she mentions the priors and Shakespeare's musk rose, which grew near the drawing-room window. Between the days when Shakespeare lived at Avonbank—the name by which it came to be known when it was used as a private residence—and the time of Miss Byerley becoming the tenant in the early part of the nineteenth century, the house passed through many stages.

At one time it was owned by a Captain Batersbee ; afterwards it was sold to Lord Middleton, who used it as a shooting-box, keeping a famous pack of hounds, which Mrs. Gaskell refers to in her story.

Later still, Captain Batersbee repurchased the house from Lord Middleton, and he was the owner when Miss Byerley was tenant ; she continued to live at Avonbank until her death in 1843, when the school was transferred to the Misses Ainsworth, and the Byerleys left Stratford-on-Avon.

In her schooldays' story, Mrs. Gaskell mentions the peculiar style of the interior of the house, one room leading into another. One of the rooms built for a ballroom by Lord Middleton was known as the oval room ; this was the principal schoolroom in Elizabeth Stevenson's days. After the house was pulled down in 1866, a new house was built at a

From a water-colour drawing by Robert Bell Whaley

OLD CLOPTON HOUSE, STRATFORD-ON-AVON, 1825

(*See p.* 124)

From a drawing by C. W. Radclyffe

AVONBANK, STRATFORD-ON-AVON

greater distance from the road, the name Avonbank being retained. In the centre of the lawn, on the site of the old house, is a creeper, which is a branch of the original wistaria that Mrs. Gaskell mentions when describing the house, though she calls it the Virginia creeper; the roots reach to the river Avon at the end of the garden. Part of the foundation of the old building is now used as a boat-house.

There was a covered passage from the road to the house, which was known to the pupils as "the elephant's trunk." This is referred to by Mrs. Gaskell as the state entrance. It is to be regretted that the old house of St. Mary has not been preserved, because of its associations with the immortal Shakespeare; but the present "Avonbank" and the grounds which adjoin the Memorial Gardens are left as a legacy by the late owner to the Trustees of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. To be born in literary Chelsea, and to be educated in the very house in which Shakespeare once lived, explains why Mrs. Gaskell was said "to have been born under a literary star."

My Lady Ludlow was a type of character after Mrs. Gaskell's own heart. Writing to Dickens, she says that she would find pleasure in describing the life of a country squire of many ancestors and acres, and in my Lady Ludlow she found a figure exactly to her taste.

The character of my Lady Ludlow at once suggests the Honourable Mrs. Jamieson in *Cranford*, and it is interesting to know that they were both founded on the same original—Lady Jane Stanley—who lived at Brook House, Knutsford: "Lady Jane was beloved by her household, and admired by the whole neighbourhood; but she had very strict notions of propriety and of the courtesies of life, and would not have them infringed. It was her custom to walk

out in state with a gold-headed cane, or, rather, staff in her hand ; and she was very tenacious of her right which her noble birth gave her of keeping the wall from whomsoever she met," writes Mr. Green in his *History of Knutsford*. Mrs. Gaskell makes use of this when telling of my Lady Ludlow driving in her carriage in the narrow Warwickshire lanes : " Once, when the idea of this design of meeting another countess in a narrow, deep-rutted lane was very prominent in my mind, I ventured to ask Mrs. Medlicott what would have to be done on such an occasion ; and she told me that ' de latest creation must back, for sure,' which puzzled me a good deal at the time, although I understand it now."

" My guide lifted up a heavy silk curtain, and I was in the presence of my Lady Ludlow." Here Mrs. Gaskell gives a more or less faithful description of Lady Jane Stanley, though the description of the house and the words of welcome refer to "Avonbank" and Elizabeth Stevenson's reception :

" She was very small of stature, and very upright. She wore a great lace cap, nearly half her own height, I should think, that went round her head (caps which tied under the chin, and which we call ' mobs,' came in later, and my lady held them in great contempt, saying people might as well come down in their night-caps). In front of my lady's cap was a great bow of white satin ribbon ; and a broad band of the same ribbon was tied tight round her head, and served to keep the cap straight. She had a fine Indian muslin shawl folded over her shoulders and across her chest, and an apron of the same ; a black silk mode gown, made with short sleeves and ruffles, and with the tail thereof pulled through the placket-hole, so as to shorten it to a useful length ; beneath it she wore, as I could plainly see, a quilted satin

petticoat. Her hair was snowy white, but I hardly saw it, it was so covered with her cap ; her skin, even at her age, was waxen in texture and tint ; her eyes were large and dark blue, and must have been her great beauty when she was young, for there was nothing particular, as far as I can remember, either in mouth or nose. She had a great gold-headed stick by her chair ; but I think it was more as a mark of state and dignity than for use ; for she had as light and brisk a step when she chose, as any girl of fifteen, and, in her private early walk of meditation in the mornings, would go as swiftly from garden alley to garden alley as any one of us.

" She was standing up when I went in. I dropped my curtsey at the door, which my mother had always taught me as a part of good manners, and went up instinctively to my lady. She did not put out her hand, but raised herself a little on tiptoe, and kissed me on both cheeks.

" 'You are cold, my child. You shall have a dish of tea with me.'

" Her waiting-maid came in, with tea ready-made and a plate of delicately-cut bread and butter, every morsel of which I could have eaten and been none the better for it, so hungry was I after my long ride."

In her tastes " my lady " showed a fine discrimination. After describing the drawing-room, the novelist says : " The room was full of scent, partly from the flowers outside, and partly from the great jars of pot-pourri inside. The choice of odours was what my lady piqued herself upon, saying nothing showed birth like a keen susceptibility of smell. We never named musk in her presence, her antipathy to it was so well understood through the household ; her opinion on the subject was believed to be, that no scent derived from an animal could ever be of a

sufficiently pure nature to give pleasure to any person of good family, where, of course, the delicate perception of the senses had been cultivated for generations.

"Attar of roses, again, she disliked. She said it reminded her of the city and of merchants' wives—over-rich, over-heavy in its perfume. And lilies of the valley somehow fell under the same condemnation. They were most graceful and elegant to look at (my lady was quite candid about this)—flower, leaf, colour—everything was refined about them but the smell. That was too strong. But the great hereditary faculty on which my lady piqued herself, and with reason, for I never met with any person who possessed it, was the power she had of perceiving the delicious odour arising from a bed of strawberries in the late autumn, when the leaves were all fading and dying."

Margaret Dawson, the narrator of the story, admits that this test did not prove that she was equal in rank to Lady Ludlow.

"'My dear, remember that you try if you can smell the scent of dying strawberry-leaves in this next autumn. You have some of Ursula Hanbury's blood in you, and that gives you a chance.'

"But when October came, I sniffed and sniffed, all to no purpose. My lady—who had watched the experiment rather anxiously—had to give me up as a hybrid. *Bacon's Essays* was one of the few books that lay about in my lady's room; and, if you took it up and opened it carelessly, it was sure to fall apart at his 'Essay on Gardens.' 'Listen,' her ladyship would say, 'to what that great philosopher and statesman says: "Next to that"—he is speaking of violets, my dear—"is the musk-rose," of which you remember the great bush, at the corner of the south wall just by the Blue Drawing-room windows; that

is the old musk-rose, Shakespeare's musk-rose, which is dying out through the kingdom now.'"

In addition to this Shakespeare's musk-rose, Mrs. Gaskell also mentions in her story, names and places in the Shakespeare country such as Hathaway Common, Barford Corner, and Henley, which were all familiar to her when a schoolgirl at Stratford-on-Avon.

Her first evening at school, when as a shy, country girl she had to face the members of this large household, is described very minutely :

" Presently I was summoned to supper. I followed the young lady, who had been sent to call me, down the wide, shallow stairs, into the great hall, through which I had first passed on my way to my Lady Ludlow's room. There were four other young gentlewomen, all standing, and all silent, who curtsied to me when I first came in. They were dressed in a kind of uniform, muslin caps bound round their heads with blue ribbons, plain muslin handkerchiefs, lawn aprons, and drab-coloured stuff gowns. They were all gathered together at a little distance from the table, on which were placed a couple of cold chickens, a salad and a fruit tart. On the dais there was a smaller round table, on which stood a silver jug filled with milk, and a small roll. Near that was set a carved chair, with a countess's coronet surmounting the back of it. I thought that someone might have spoken to me ; but they were shy, and I was shy ; or else there was some other reason ; but, indeed, almost the minute after I had come into the hall by the door at the lower hand, her ladyship entered by the door opening upon the dais ; whereupon we all curtsied very low ; I, because I saw the others do it. She stood and looked at us for a moment.

" ' Young gentlewomen,' said she, ' make Margaret Dawson welcome among you,' and they treated me

with the kind politeness due to a stranger; but, still, without any talking beyond what was required for the purposes of the meal."

The pupils at Avonbank School were accustomed to attend the services at Shakespeare's Church, which was close by, and the description of the family worship in the school makes it easy to see where Mrs. Gaskell gained her sympathy with, and interest in, the Church of England. Her parents and many of her relatives and friends were Unitarians, and she remained throughout life true to her religious training; but later in life, when away from home, it was her custom to attend the services at the Established Church in preference to a Dissenting chapel in those places where there was no Unitarian place of worship. She was always on good terms with the clergy of the Church of England, and in later years she numbered Charles Kingsley, Dean Stanley, F. Denison Maurice, and Jowett of Oxford amongst her personal friends.

Her description of the Rev. Mr. Mountford, the old hunting parson, who had obtained preferment through his excellent horsemanship, is true to the times. "He would have loved to keep a pack of hounds—'a very small pack'—but the Bishop declined to permit this."

"Nor was Mr. Mountford a bad clergyman; as clergymen went in those days. He did not drink, though he liked good eating as much as anyone. And if any poor person was ill, and he heard of it, he would send them plates from his own dinner of what he himself liked best; sometimes of dishes which were almost as bad as poison to sick people. . . .

"He could not bear to see pain, or sorrow, or misery of any kind; and, if it came under his notice, he was never easy till he had relieved it, for the time, at any rate. But he was afraid of being made

uncomfortable; so, if he possibly could, he would avoid seeing anyone who was ill or unhappy; and he did not thank anyone for telling him about them."

In contrast to Mr. Mountford, Mrs. Gaskell introduces as his successor the "good Mr. Gray," who is determined—in spite of my lady's strong opposition—to establish a Sunday School in Donnington. "'My lady, I cannot answer it to my conscience, if I allow the children of this village to go on any longer, the little heathens that they are. I must do something to alter their condition; I am quite aware that your ladyship disapproves of many of the plans which have suggested themselves to me, but, nevertheless, I must do something, and I am come now to your ladyship to ask respectfully, but firmly, what you would advise me to do.'"

After arguing the point, my lady says: "'You must excuse me, Mr. Gray, if I speak plainly.'

"'My lady, I want plain-speaking. I myself am not accustomed to those ceremonies and forms which are, I suppose, the etiquette in your ladyship's rank of life, and which seem to hedge you in from any power of mine to touch you. Among those with whom I have passed my life, hitherto, it has been the custom to speak plainly out what we here felt earnestly. So, instead of needing any apology from your ladyship for straightforward speaking, I will meet what you say at once, and admit that it is the clergyman's fault, in a great measure, when the children of his parish swear, and curse, and are brutal, and ignorant of all saving grace, nay, some of them of the very name of God.'"

The character of Mr. Gray is founded on that of the Rev. William Turner, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, who was Elizabeth Stevenson's guardian for two years

after her father's death in 1829. He established the first Sunday School in Newcastle-on-Tyne, in 1784, and Elizabeth Stevenson owed much to the influence of this godly man, who was her mother's cousin by marriage. Here is Mrs. Gaskell's tribute to her guardian : " Mr. Gray I never thought of with love ; the feeling was almost reverence with which I looked upon him. I have not wished to speak much of myself, or else I could have told you how much he had been to me during these many years of illness."

" These many years " probably refers to a later period of life, when Mrs. Gaskell had an illness in Manchester, and Mr. Turner lived with his daughter not far from Mrs. Gaskell's own home, to which he was a frequent visitor. Mr. Turner figures in *Ruth* as the " good Mr. Benson," the Dissenting minister. The character of Mr. Gray is that of a Nonconformist minister in the guise of a Church of England clergyman. Mrs. Gaskell has been blamed for making almost all her ministerial characters clergymen ; but in *Ruth* she has tried to remedy that by giving a good type of a Dissenting minister.

Most of Elizabeth Stevenson's fellow-pupils were from Church of England families, and the religious instruction given in the school was in accordance with the views of the Established Church.

" After supper was over, and grace was said by one of our party, my lady rang her hand-bell, and the servants came in and cleared away the supper things ; then they brought in a portable reading-desk, which was placed on the dais, and, the whole household trouping in, my lady called to one of my companions to come up and read the Psalms and Lessons for the day. My lady thought it schismatic to have any prayers, excepting those in the Prayer Book ; and would as soon have preached a sermon herself in the

parish church, as have allowed anyone not a deacon, at the least, to read prayers in a private dwelling-house. I am not sure that even then she would have approved of his reading them in an unconsecrated place."

After the evening worship, the pupils retired to their bedrooms, and in the story Margaret Dawson gives a detailed account of her bedroom.

"Then came a pause of silence, and then she rang her bell and desired her waiting-maid, Adams, to show me to my room."

Mrs. Gaskell evidently forgets that the teller of the tale is supposed to be a visitor in a large mansion, where the bedrooms would be expected to conform to her description of Hanbury Court, for she lapses into reminiscences of her actual first night at Avonbank, where she is assigned a plain, little bedroom such as a schoolgirl would get in the early part of the nineteenth century.

"It was so small, that I think it must have been a cell. The walls were whitewashed stone; the bed was of white dimity. There was a small piece of red stair carpet on each side of the bed, and two chairs. In a closet adjoining were my washstand and toilet table. There was a text of Scripture painted on the wall, just opposite my bed; and below hung a print, common enough in those days, of King George and Queen Charlotte, with all their numerous children, down to the little Princess Amelia in a go-cart. On each side hung a small portrait, also engraved; on the left, it was Louis the Sixteenth; on the other, Marie Antoinette. On the chimney-piece there was a tinder-box and Prayer Book. I do not remember anything else in the room. Indeed, in those days people did not dream of writing-tables, and inkstands and portfolios, and easy chairs, and what not. We

were taught to go into our bedrooms for the purposes of dressing, and sleeping, and praying."

At Clopton House, about a mile from Avonbank, there is still to be seen the priests' room, with a verse from the Scriptures painted in Old English letters on two sides of the room, and on the third the following lines :

"Whether you rise earlye
Or goe to bed late,
Remember Christ Jesus
Who died for your sake."

The outside wall has a small window, which is strongly barred. It was just such a room as this that Miss Stevenson occupied.

In the second chapter of *My Lady Ludlow* the novelist says : " Before I tell you about Mr. Gray, I think I ought to make you understand something more of what we did all day long at Hanbury Court. There were five of us at the time of which I am speaking, all young women of good descent and allied (however distantly) to people of rank. When we were not with my lady, Mrs. Medlicott looked after us. . . . She could darn either lace, table-linen, India muslin, or stockings, so that no one would tell where the hole or rent had been. . . . We worked under her during a great part of the day, either in the still room, or at our own sewing in a chamber that opened out of the great hall. My lady despised every kind of work that would now be called Fancy-work. She considered that the use of coloured threads or worsted was only fit to amuse children ; but that grown women ought not to be taken with mere blues and reds, but to restrict their pleasure in sewing to making small and delicate stitches. . . .

" Very frequently one of us would be summoned to

My Lady to read aloud to her, as she sat in her small with-drawing room, some improving book.

" It was generally Mr. Addison's *Spectator*, but one year I remember we had to read *Sturm's Reflections*, translated from a German book Mrs. Medlicott recommended. Mr. Sturm told us what to think about for every day in the year, and very dull it was ; but I believe Queen Charlotte had liked the book very much, and the thought of her royal approbation kept my lady awake during the reading. *Mrs. Chapone's Letters* and *Dr. Gregory's Advice to Young Ladies* composed the rest of our library for week-day reading.

" I, for one, was glad to leave my fine sewing, and even my reading aloud (though this last did keep me with my dear lady) to go to the still-room and potter about among the preserves and the medicated waters. . . .

"We learnt to make all the cakes and dishes of the season in the still-room. We had plum-porridge and mince-pies at Christmas, fritters and pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, furmenty on Mothering Sunday, violet-cakes in Passion Week, tansy-pudding on Easter Sunday, three-cornered cakes on Trinity Sunday, and so on through the year, all made from good old Church receipts, handed down from one of my lady's earliest Protestant ancestresses."

The Avonbank School was conducted on advanced methods, and included the teaching of deportment and correct etiquette, in accordance with the views of education at that period. Miss Byerley was a teacher of marked ability, and Elizabeth Stevenson benefited both directly and indirectly from her association with the school.

Madame Mohl, Mrs. Beecher Stowe, Miss Winkworth, Mrs. Lynn Linton, and Lady Ritchie all testify to Mrs. Gaskell's charming and unaffected manners, and it

was largely owing to her old governess that she possessed " the art of being a true lady."

"My lady came in with her quiet, active step—as if she was sorry to have us kept waiting—and as she entered, she gave us all round one of those graceful sweeping curtsies, of which I think the art must have died out with her, it implied so much courtesy ; this time it said, as well as words could do, 'I am so sorry to have kept you all waiting—forgive me.'"

At another time, " my lady's " courtesy was shown when entertaining her plebeian friends.

Mrs. Brooke, who had shown her lack of good breeding by taking out her Bandana pocket handkerchief and spreading it over her best silk gown, was saved from ridicule by the tact and courtesy of " My Lady Ludlow."

" Ay ! there's my own dear Lady Ludlow, God bless her ! She takes out her own pocket handkerchief, all snowy cambric, and lays it softly down on her velvet lap, for all the world as if she did it every day of her life, just like Mrs. Brooke, the baker's wife; and when the one got up to shake the crumbs into the fireplace, the other did just the same. But with such a grace ! and such a look at us all ! . . . the tears came into my old silly eyes—and Mr. Gray was made so happy by this pretty action of my lady's, that he talked away all the rest of the evening."

Entering the school at an age which is especially susceptible to outside influences, Elizabeth Stevenson was impressed by the methodical habits and industry of the principal of the school, where " everything went on noiselessly, perfectly, and by clock-work."

" Before I had seen the background of a great lady's life, I had thought it all play and fine doings. But whatever other grand people are, my lady was never idle."

The pupils at Avonbank were devoted to Miss Byerley, and this whole-hearted devotion probably suggested Miss Galindo's assertion: "'If Lady Ludlow ever honours me by asking for my right hand, I'll cut it off and wrap the stump up so tidily, she shall never find out it bleeds.'"

In the story which tells so much of her schooldays, the novelist says: "My lady had been maid of honour to Queen Charlotte, and was a Hanbury of that old stock who flourished in the days of the Plantagenets."

The father of Miss Byerley, in his position as manager for the Wedgwoods, had frequently to take new specimens of pottery to Queen Charlotte for her personal inspection. Writing in his memoranda, from London to Etruria, on April 29th, 1907, Mr. Byerley says: "I wish I had something to go to the Queen with. She graciously expects us at this time of the year; but I know of nothing new or good enough."

As he could claim descent from Lord Wharton, of Durham, he may have secured an appointment for one of his daughters in the Royal household. It is evident that they were acquainted with the inner life of Court society, for Catherine Byerley wrote, under the pseudonym of Grace Wharton, several works, including *The Queens of Society* (published in 1860), *The Wits and Beaux of Society*, and *The Literature of Society*.

Miss Boucheret, one of the early supporters of the Women's Suffrage Movement, was educated at Avonbank, and it is probable that Mrs. Gaskell acquired at school that independence of thought and action which characterised her in later life, and which led her to champion the cause of the Married Women's Property Bill, the petition in favour of which she was one of the first to sign, along with Mary Howitt and Harriet Martineau. In *My Lady Ludlow*, Mrs.

Gaskell depicts a conservative aristocrat of the old school, who believed in the inherited rights of the upper classes:

" 'The great old families of England were a distinct race, just as a cart-horse is one creature, and very useful in its place, and Childers or Eclipse is another creature, though both are of the same species. So the old families have gifts and powers of a different and higher class to what the other orders have.' "

The novelist gives an amusing account of my lady engaging a servant, which fits Lady Jane Stanley better than Miss Byerley, who recognised the benefits of education in fitting girls to earn their own living. " When a young woman came to be hired, my lady would have her in, and see if she liked her looks, and her dress; and question her about her family. Her ladyship laid great stress upon this latter point, saying that a girl who did not warm up when any interest or curiosity was expressed about her mother, or 'the baby' (if there was one), was not likely to make a good servant. Then she would make her put out her feet, to see if they were well and neatly shod. Then she would bid her say the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. Then she enquired if she could write. If she could, and she had liked all that had gone before, her face sank—it was a great disappointment, for it was an all but inviolable rule with her never to engage a servant who could write. But I have known her ladyship break through it, although in both cases in which she did so, she put the girl's principles to a further and unusual test in asking her to repeat the Ten Commandments. One pert young woman—and yet I was sorry for her, too, only she afterwards married a rich draper in Shrewsbury—who had got through her trials pretty tolerably, considering she could write, spoilt all by saying glibly, at the end of

the last Commandment, 'An't please your ladyship, I can cast accounts.'

"'Go away, wench,' said my lady, in a hurry; 'you're only fit for trade; you will not suit me for a servant.' The girl went away crestfallen; in a minute, however, my lady sent me after her to see that she had something to eat before leaving the house."

In another conversation, my lady admits that both education and money may be used rightly if we only pray against the temptations they bring with them. This blending of Lady Jane Stanley and Miss Byerley is not a good composite character, for the novelist has not given either a good specimen of a titled lady's home life or of the life of a principal of a superior boarding school. In one place the forty pupils figure as tenants, and in another the five boarders troop in as charity guests dependent on "my lady."

The story of *My Lady Ludlow* is not well planned; it seems to have been written at odd times, and lacks the dove-tailing and constructive skill which the writer usually displays in her other stories. In one place there is a part description of the drawing-room, and later it is referred to again. The wall-paper was evidently from the same roll as that used in Margaret Dawson's home in Edinburgh, when she was quite an old lady. The description is the same, and it is probable that the writer forgot that she had already used "the Indian paper" for another drawing-room.

"The side on which the fireplace stood was all panelled—part of the old ornaments of the house, for there was an Indian paper, with birds and beasts and insects on it, on all the other sides."

The relation between the Misses Byerley and the Wedgwoods is seen in the description of the ornaments

in the drawing-room : " There were china jars of all shapes and sizes round and about the room, and some china monsters, or idols, of which I could never bear the sight : they were so ugly, though I think my lady valued them more than all."

The novelist admits the want of continuity in the story, for she writes : " I have wandered away from time and place. I tell you all the remembrance I have of those years just as they come up, and I hope that in my old age I am not getting too like a Mrs. Nickleby, whose speeches were once read out aloud to me."

There is a lack of care with regard to some of the details in the story, and Mrs. Gaskell did not always control her imaginative powers, but allowed her pen to run away with her. In the early part of the story she extols the servants, whilst later on she complains that half of them are inefficient.

About half-way through, the author breaks the thread of the story by allowing Lady Ludlow to give a graphic account of an incident connected with the French Revolution, which takes up one-third of the space of the whole story ; and, although the narrator says: " The whole thing (referring to the debatable question whether it was right to have a Sunday School established in Donnington) reminds me so much of a story of what happened to a friend of mine," it is not possible to see where the connection comes in.

At the finish of this tragic story of the French Revolution, the novelist concludes : " ' It is a sad story, your ladyship,' said I. ' Yes, it is.' " And then comes one of Mrs. Gaskell's frequent reflections with which her stories are interspersed, and in this case it is a kind of apology : " People seldom arrive at my age without having watched the beginning, middle, and end of many lives and many fortunes. We do

not talk about them, perhaps; for they are often so sacred to us, from having touched into the very quick of our own hearts, as it were, or into those of others who are dead and gone, and veiled over from human sight, that we cannot tell the tale as if it were a mere story. But young people should remember that we have had this solemn experience of life, on which to base our opinions and form our judgments, so that they are not mere untried theories."

The story of *My Lady Ludlow* is afterwards resumed, and in the concluding chapter the novelist makes use of Sally, the same servant that figures in *Ruth*. Evidently this servant is a character drawn from life, and Mrs. Gaskell agreed with Miss Galindo's practical remarks:

"'Now, Sally, to-morrow we'll try to hash the beef well, and to remember the butter, and to work out our own salvation all at the same time, for I don't see why it can't all be done, as God has set us to do it all.'"

Mrs. Gaskell did not adopt Lady Ludlow's views with regard to the education of the poorer classes. She helped her servants to improve themselves, and for several years, on one evening a week, she gave instruction to the members of her Sunday School class in various subjects, including geography and history, at her home in Plymouth Grove.

The story is lightened here and there by droll characters; there is Harry Gregson and his interview with "My Lady."

"'You must not read letters that are not intended for you.'"

"'Please, my lady, I thought it were good for practice, all as one as a book.'

"My lady looked bewildered.

"'You would not listen, I am sure,' said she, 'to anything you were not intended to hear.'

"'Please, my lady, I always hearken when I hear folk talking secrets, but I mean no harm.'"

It was this same Harry Gregson who fell and broke his thigh bone, whereupon my lady remarked: "Harry Gregson! that black-eyed lad who read my letter? It all comes from over education."

There is Miss Galindo, surely a second cousin to the ladies of Cranford. "Miss Galindo was dressed in her best gown, I am sure; but I had never seen anything like it except in a picture: it was so old-fashioned. She wore a white muslin apron, delicately embroidered, and put on a little crookedly, in order, she told us, before the evening was over, to conceal a spot where the colour had been discharged by a lemon-stain. This crookedness had an odd effect, especially when I saw that it was intentional; indeed, she was so anxious about her apron's right adjustment in the wrong place, that she told us straight out why she wore it so, and asked her ladyship if the spot was properly hidden, at the same time lifting up her apron and showing her how large it was."

It was Miss Galindo who was "nearly being an authoress once."

"'An authoress, Miss Galindo! You surprise me.'

"'But, indeed, I was. All was quite ready. . . . I got paper and half-a-hundred good pens, a bottle of ink—all ready.'

"'And then——'

"'Oh! it ended in my having nothing to say, when I sat down to write.'"

Miss Galindo's philosophy was original, but did not tend to make her popular. "'When everything goes wrong, one would give up breathing, if one could not lighten one's heart by a joke. But when I've to sit still from morning till night, I must have something

to stir my blood, or I should go off into an apoplexy ; so I set to and quarrel with Sally.' "

On one occasion she was going into a cottage, and in the doorway met the good woman chasing out a duck, and apparently unconscious of her visitor.

" 'Get out, Miss Galindo ! ' she cried, addressing the duck. ' Get out ! '

" 'Oh, I ask your pardon,' she continued, as if seeing the lady for the first time. ' It's only that weary duck will come in.'

" 'Get out, Miss Gal—— ' (to the duck).

" 'And so you call it after me, do you ? ' inquired her visitor.

" 'Oh, yes, ma'am ; my master would have it so ; for, he said, sure enough the unlucky bird was always poking herself where she was not wanted.' "

Miss Galindo's views on marriage give Mrs. Gaskell a chance to show her intimate knowledge of human nature.

" 'Indeed, my lady, I have long left off trying to conjecture what makes Jack fancy Gill, or Gill, Jack. It's best to sit down quiet under the belief that marriages are made for us, somewhere out of this world, and out of the range of this world's reason and laws. I'm not so sure that I should settle it down that they were made in Heaven—t'other place seems to me as likely a workshop ; but at any rate, I've given up troubling my head as to why they take place.' "

Even the old parson, Mr. Mountford, by his eccentricities, contributes to the humour of the story.

" Mr. Mountford died quite suddenly at last. We were all very sorry to lose him. He left some of his property (for he had a private estate) to the poor of the parish, to furnish them with an annual Christmas

dinner of roast beef and plum pudding; for which he wrote out a very good receipt in the codicil of his will.

"Moreover, he desired his executors to see that the vault in which the Vicars of Hanbury were interred was well aired, before his coffin was taken in; for, all his life long, he had had a dread of damp, and latterly he kept his rooms to such a pitch of warmth that some thought it hastened his end."

In Shakespeare's Church is a small stone tablet to the memory of Miss Maria Byerley, erected by her former pupils after her death in 1843.

The inscription reads:

"In memory of Maria Byerley,
MDCCCXLIII
Eccles. XII
The Spirit shall return unto God
who gave it."

It may be safe to affirm that Mrs. Gaskell contributed to this simple memorial of affectionate remembrance of her old governess, for she always looked back on her schooldays with gratitude.

When the memorial tablet was placed in the church, a position over the choir-stalls, not far from Shakespeare's grave, was chosen, but since then it has been removed to the south transept. Visitors will experience a difficulty in finding it, as it is covered by the curtain at the back of the altar.

The finish of the story of Mrs. Gaskell's schooldays is a kind of farewell *résumé*, and then come the words that are a sort of reverie from the heart of the thoughtful woman, who wrote the story, rather than the school girl who is the narrator.

"I have often wondered which one misses most when they are dead and gone—the bright creatures

full of life, who are hither and thither and everywhere, so that no one can reckon upon their coming and going, with whom stillness and the long quiet of the grave seems utterly irreconcilable, so full are they of vivid motion and passion—or the slow, serious people, whose movements, nay, whose very words seem to go by clockwork; and never appear much to affect the course of our life whilst they are with us, but whose methodical ways show themselves, when they are gone, to have been intertwined with our very roots of daily existence. I think I miss these last the most, although I may here love the former best." The latter part refers to her old governess.

"It was then settled that my departure from Hanbury, my happy home for so long, was to take place before many weeks had passed."

Elizabeth Stevenson left Stratford-on-Avon in 1827, returning to her home at Knutsford. Her aunt was "delighted to receive her niece after so long an absence," and had it not been that just about this time her only brother disappeared, which caused her father much anxiety and probably led to a breakdown in his health, she would have stayed with her aunt permanently; but shortly after leaving school her father sent for her to Chelsea, where she lived for the next two years far from happily, but her school days at Stratford-on-Avon were always a pleasant memory.

This story of *My Lady Ludlow* was the one which succeeded the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and it was written at a time when Mrs. Gaskell had hardly recovered from the severe criticisms that the biography had brought upon her, and when she was said to have had a distaste for writing. This accounts to a certain extent for the want of a good plot, and the unsatisfactory sequence of events, for it is evident that Mrs.

Gaskell had not got possession of her full powers of writing a well-balanced story.

Mrs. Gaskell's first published article was written in 1838, in the form of a letter to William Howitt, thanking him for the great pleasure she had derived in reading his *Visits to Remarkable Places*. In this letter, she gives an account of one of her half-holidays spent at Clopton House, in Stratford-on-Avon, and asks Mr. Howitt to explore the neighbourhood thoroughly.

"As a schoolgirl I could not see much, but I heard of many places that I longed to know more about." Among the places mentioned are Compton Winyates, Shottery, Charlecote, and a farm near Clifford.

In *My Lady Ludlow* her ladyship writes to Margaret's mother regarding the holidays of her young *protégées*: "I reserve to myself the option of paying their travelling expenses—disliking gadding women." This may account to some extent for Elizabeth Stevenson staying at Avonbank for the two years without a break, and it evidently explains why she saw so little of the places of interest around.

There was one historic house, a little more than a mile from the school, which was the home of one of Elizabeth Stevenson's fellow-pupils. Several of the girls were invited to spend their half-holiday at Clopton House, and it is the remembrance of this visit which prompted Mrs. Gaskell to write to William Howitt:

"I wonder if you know Clopton Hall, about a mile from Stratford-on-Avon. Will you allow me to tell you of a very happy day I once spent there? I was at school in the neighbourhood, and one of my schoolfellows was the daughter of a Mr. W——, who then lived at Clopton. Mrs. W—— asked a party of the girls to go and spend a long afternoon, and we set off

one beautiful autumn day, full of delight and wonder respecting the place we were going to see."

Her interest in the place had been stimulated by having seen the grave of Charlotte Clopton in the church at Stratford-on-Avon, and hearing the weird ghost story connected with it, for, like Miss Matty in *Cranford*, Mrs. Gaskell ever cherished a leaning towards ghosts.

This first timid attempt at literature was not published in her own name or even as a separate contribution. William Howitt mentions it as being written by " a fair lady," and refers to her as " my fair correspondent." In later editions, he has a footnote referring to the lady as " since well known as the authoress of *Mary Barton*"; and when everybody knew who wrote *Mary Barton*, he uses the name by which she came to be known in the literary world—Mrs. Gaskell.

This is the only bit of autobiography written in the form of a letter which Mrs. Gaskell ever published. The first sentence, reminiscent of her schooldays, is characteristic of the writer's modesty and retiring manner. It is this which helps to make her so fascinating. There is nothing didactic: she charms by her personality, which shines through all her books. She strikes a pleasant note at the very beginning of the descriptive letter, and succeeds in getting her readers interested by her simple way of approaching the subject.

In this letter to William Howitt, she gives a detailed description of the approach to Clopton House, and the tessellated marble floor of the hall, hung round with portraits of people " who had been in their graves for two hundred years or more," is noticed. The merry party of schoolgirls was told by their kind hostess that they might ramble where they liked,

taking care to be in the "recessed parlour" by tea-time. Elizabeth Stevenson says she preferred to wander up the wide shelving oak staircase, with its massy balustrade, all crumbling and worm-eaten. With her love for the supernatural—even when a schoolgirl—she explored one of the disused bedrooms (said to have been haunted), which, "with its close, pent-up atmosphere and the long shadows of evening creeping on, gave me an 'eirie' feeling."

"In this room hung a portrait so singularly beautiful; a sweet-looking girl, with paly gold hair combed back from her forehead and falling in wavy ringlets on her neck, and with eyes that 'looked like violets filled with dew,' for there was the glittering of unshed tears before their deep dark blue—and that was the likeness of Charlotte Clopton, about whom there was so fearful a legend told at Stratford church."

Charlotte Clopton, who was supposed to have died of the sickness or plague, was buried with "fearful haste." She was discovered—when the ancestral vault was opened to receive another victim of the plague—leaning against the wall in her grave clothes; she was, indeed, dead, but in her agonies of despair and hunger she had bitten a piece from her white shoulder! "Of course, she has *walked* ever since," as the novelist says.

The writer's love of research was still further gratified when she explored the chaplain's room. "Beyond was an old Catholic chapel, with a chaplain's room, which had been walled up and forgotten till within the last few years. I went in on my hands and knees, for the entrance was very low. I recollect little in the chapel; but in the chaplain's room were old, and I should think, rare, editions of many books, mostly folios. A large yellow-paper copy of Dryden's *All for Love, or the World Well Lost*, dated 1686,

THE RECESSED PARLOUR, CLOPTON HOUSE

caught my eye, and is the only one I particularly remember."

This holiday seems to have impressed itself on the young schoolgirl, which is not surprising, for later she writes: "So numerous were the crooked, half-lighted passages, that I wondered if I could find my way back again. There was a curious carved old chest in one of these passages, and with girlish curiosity I tried to open it; but the lid was too heavy, till I persuaded one of my companions to help me, and, when it was opened, what do you think we saw?—BONES!—but whether human, whether the remains of the lost bride, we did not stay to see, but ran off in partly feigned, and partly real, terror."

This reference to Rogers' *Ginevra* shows the novelist's interest in mysterious disappearances, which was a favourite subject of hers. In later years she came to be an honoured guest at Samuel Rogers' select breakfast parties in London.

The gruesome find aroused her curiosity, and she concludes by saying: "I tried to obtain any information I could as to the family of Clopton of Clopton. They had been decaying ever since the Civil Wars; had for a generation or two been unable to live in the old house of their fathers, but had toiled in London, or abroad, for a livelihood; and the last of the old family, a bachelor, eccentric, miserly, old, and of most filthy habits, if report said true, had died at Clopton Hall but a few months before, a sort of boarder in Mr. W——'s family. He was buried in the gorgeous chapel of the Cloptons in Stratford church, where you see the banners waving, and the armour hung over one or two splendid monuments."

The novelist must have kept up her interest in this old manor-house, for she says: "A year or two afterwards, the heir-at-law, a very distant relation

living in Ireland, claimed and obtained the estate, on the plea of undue influence, if not of forgery, on Mr. W——'s part; and the last I heard of our kind entertainers on that day, was that they were outlawed, and living in Brussels."

Clopton House dates from the thirteenth century, when a member of the ancient Clopton family obtained a grant of property and built this as the Manor House.

The most famous of the older Cloptons was the good Sir Hugh, who, at the end of the fifteenth century, was Lord Mayor of London. It was Sir Hugh Clopton who built the bridge over the Avon, which bears his name. He was also a great benefactor of Stratford Church, and there is a massive altar-tomb in the Clopton chapel to his memory.

Clopton chapel, in which Elizabeth Stevenson mused as a schoolgirl, contains the magnificent tombs of the descendants of Sir Hugh Clopton. One Carew, who became Baron Clopton, and is referred to in *My Lady Ludlow*, is buried here with his wife. On their tombs are their full-sized effigies in alabaster, highly coloured to be more life-like. Another tomb in the Clopton chapel is that of William Clopton and his wife. On the wall over the tomb is a stone tablet containing the carved figures of their seven children. One of them is the Margaret Clopton whom Mrs. Gaskell mentions.

William Howitt, after reading Mrs. Gaskell's article, writes:

"I was strongly drawn towards Clopton; and on my visit to Stratford I hastened eagerly to see a spot so attractive in its history, and so graphically described. It was too late. A new lord was in possession. Asking to see the old family portraits, which were now consigned to a back gallery, the young lord

CLOPTON CHAPEL

of the house replied : ' They are wretched affairs : I am not at all related to the family ; and I do not know what I could better do with them.' But I looked them over," says Mr. Howitt, " they did not exceed two dozen in number ; and amongst them I looked in vain for Charlotte Clopton, with ' her locks of paly gold,' or for Margaret, with ' her beautiful face, and dark brown ringlets flowing on her shoulders.' ' Was not there such and such a tradition, and such and such a picture ? ' ' There were such traditions,' was the reply. Well, but where were the pictures of Charlotte and Margaret Clopton ? They were not there ! In some of the many changes which had occurred, somebody had taken them away—somebody, it is to be hoped, who valued them. . . . It was useless pressing further inquiries upon the new proprietor ; but I saw some women collecting apples in the orchard, who were old enough to have known the house well in its former state. I asked them ; and they knew the portraits familiarly, just as described by my fair correspondent, Mrs. Gaskell ; and they knew that they were there not very long ago."

Evidently when William Howitt visited Clopton House, the portraits had got into the hands " of somebody who valued them," for they now hang on the walls of the staircase, and are in an excellent state of preservation.

For years Clopton House was in a very dilapidated condition, but the father of the present owner—Sir Arthur Hodgson—has done much to restore this famous house to its former grandeur. It has been renovated and partly rebuilt ; the old Tudor entrance at the side of the house is the only part of the exterior that is as it was when Elizabeth Stevenson spent her half-holiday there, but parts of the interior are still as in 1827. The " recessed parlour," where

the merry party of schoolgirls had tea, is to be seen with its beautiful painted window, and the chaplain's room (in which the Gunpowder Plot was hatched), which it is strange Mrs. Gaskell does not mention. It is now known as the text-room, because of the texts printed on the walls.

The scene in the introduction of *The Taming of the Shrew* has been associated with Clopton House, but there is not sufficient evidence to identify the place, though Shakespeare is said to have visited Clopton House when a boy, as a friend of the sons of the retainers. The Mr. W—— whom Mrs. Gaskell mentions as being in possession of the house during her visit was, on the authority of an old Stratfordian, who knows the history of Clopton House well, a Mr. Wyatt, a solicitor, who, as Mrs. Gaskell mentions, " was ousted by the heir-at-law shortly afterwards."

This account of a visit to Clopton House was written by Mrs. Gaskell when she was twenty-eight, ten years before *Mary Barton* was published ; and there is no record of anything that was written during the long interval.

Another story associated with Elizabeth Stevenson's schooldays at Stratford-on-Avon is *Lois the Witch*, which was first published as a serial in *All the Year Round* in 1859, thirty-two years after she left school. It was afterwards included in a volume of short stories, under the title of *Right at Last and Other Tales*, published in 1860 by Sampson Low & Co.

Strange customs and weird, uncanny stories of the superstitious ages always had a fascination for Mrs. Gaskell ; even when a girl she had a love for the supernatural, and, like Charlotte Brontë, found her sphere among her school friends in telling ghost-stories ; it is said she never lacked a group of eager listeners. Lady Ritchie also mentions Mrs. Gaskell's

genius as a teller of ghost stories, and how she could entertain her hearers by tales of the unseen. All through her life, she loved to linger in the borderland. In writing to Mrs. Howitt, in 1838, about the old customs and associations of Knutsford, she thinks it worth while to mention that she knew a man who had seen the Fairies. She also refers to the tradition that at Alderley Edge, the hill between Cheshire and Derbyshire, she could point out " the entrance to the cave where King Arthur and his knights lie sleeping in their golden armour, till the day when England's peril shall summon them to her rescue."

The story of the Barford Witch is told by Lois Barclay, the Vicar's daughter, and this is probably the foundation of *Lois the Witch.*

In 1604 there was a treatise written by one Henry Holland, possibly one of the Lancashire Hollands, against witchcraft, which Mrs. Gaskell may have seen. She had also read the gruesome account of the fearful witch-killing, which took place at Salem, in Massachusetts, and she freely draws from a history of the United States, which gives a long account of the witch-finding and witch-killing at that place.

The age of superstition, in which witchcraft flourished in England, dates from the sixteenth century, and continued even until the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In the story, Mrs. Gaskell shows that the Puritans, who sailed to America to avoid religious persecution in this country, and founded the New England States, carried with them the germs of superstitious belief in witchcraft, which found a congenial soil in their new country, where it flourished long after it had ceased to cause much trouble in Western Europe.

It is quite evident that the novelist had seen the accounts of the " witch-fever " in Massachusetts, as

the story follows very closely the events recorded in the history of the New England States.

In addition, the thoughts of the writer of the story were further directed to the subject by hearing of a poor woman in Sussex, who was accused of being a witch, and was about to be put to death, when a friend of the novelist, a country magistrate, interfered and saved her life.

The heroine of the story is a young girl, Lois, a native of Barford, a village a few miles from Warwick. Elizabeth Stevenson had probably visited the place when living at Stratford-on-Avon, and it is most likely that the story of the Barford witch was told to her when a girl at school. The father of Lois Barclay had been the clergyman of Barford, and, like the Vicar of Bray, had not found it difficult to adapt his views to the changing times of the Commonwealth and Restoration periods. Lois is afterwards cruelly reminded of this by her aunt, who tells her that her father "took the oaths to Charles Stuart, and stuck by his living when all godly men left theirs."

After the death of her parents, Lois journeys to New England to stay with her aunt, whom she has never seen. The skipper of the vessel in which she sails is a bluff, but kind-hearted sailor, who has little sympathy with the New Englanders, and shows an intimate knowledge of their character.

"'They are a queer set, these New Englanders,' said Captain Holdernesse. 'They are rare chaps for praying; down on their knees at every turn of their life. Folk are none so busy in a new country, else they would have to pray like me, with a "Yo-hoy!" on each side of my prayer, and a rope cutting like fire through my hand. Yon pilot was for calling us all to thanksgiving for a good voyage and lucky escape from pirates; but I said I always put up my

thanks on dry land, after I had got my ship into harbour.'"

Lois has a very cold reception when she reaches her destination at Salem, in Massachusetts, and she is very soon brought into touch with the religious bigotry which was a characteristic feature of these Puritan colonists.

Salem obtained an unenviable notoriety for its excesses during the "witchcraft fever." The novelist in her story uses the actual names of the places, such as Salem, New England, and Boston; and she refers to the Rev. Cotton Mather, who was one of the principal agents in spreading a belief in witchcraft and in bringing a number of people to a violent death. He believed that New England was the sole place of refuge for genuine Christianity, and that Satan was perpetually contriving to destroy that refuge, and corrupt the people in it. He has left a record of the movement in *Memorable Providences Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions, with Discoveries and Appendix*, which was published in Boston in 1689 and reprinted in London, when Richard Baxter wrote a preface. He also wrote *The Wonders of the Invisible World* and *Observations upon the Nature, the Number, and the Operations of the Devils.*

Captain Holdernesse in the story introduces the subject of witchcraft in a conversation with Lois. After relating the perils to which the New Englanders were subject, he says:

"'Folk get affrighted of the real dangers, and in their fright imagine, perchance, dangers that are not. But who knows? Holy Scripture speaks of witches and wizards, and of the power of the Evil One in desert places; and, even in the old country, we have heard tell of those who have sold their souls for ever for the little power they get for a few years in earth.'"

It is in response to this statement that Lois relates the story of the Barford witch, and the novelist at this early stage gives a clear indication of coming disaster to Lois.

" 'They are fearful creatures, the witches! and yet I am sorry for the poor old women, whilst I dread them. We had one in Barford, when I was a little child. No one knew whence she came, but she settled herself down in a mud-hut by the common-side; and there she lived—she and her cat. . . .'" When the witch was put to death in consequence of so much sickness and misfortune being attributed to her, Lois, in charge of the nurse, accidentally came upon the scene.

" 'They were all gazing towards the water, and the maid held me up in her arms, to see the sight above the shoulders of the people; and I saw old Hannah in the water, her grey hair all streaming down her shoulders, and her face bloody and black with the stones and mud they had been throwing at her, and her cat tied round her neck. I hid my face, I know, as soon as I saw the fearful sight, for her eyes met mine as they were glaring with fury—poor, helpless, baited creature! and she caught the sight of me, and cried out, "Parson's wench, parson's wench, yonder, in thy nurse's arms, thy dad hath never tried for to save me; and none shall save thee, when thou art brought up for a witch." ' "

The narrator of the story, at a later stage, again refers to witchcraft when dealing with the superstitious beliefs of Nattee, the old Indian servant.

" Nattee, the old Indian servant, would occasionally make Lois's blood run cold, as she and Faith and Prudence listened to the wild stories she told them of the wizards of her race. It was often in the kitchen, in the darkening evening, while some cooking process

was going on, that the old Indian crone, sitting on her haunches by the bright red wood embers, which sent up no flame but a lurid light, reversing the shadows of all the faces round, told her weird stories, while they were waiting the rising of the dough, perchance, out of which the household bread had to be made. There ran through those stories always a ghastly, unexpressed suggestion of some human sacrifice being needed to complete the success of any incantation to the Evil One; and the poor old creature, herself believing and shuddering as she narrated the tale in broken English, took a strange, unconscious pleasure in her power over her hearers—young girls of the oppressing race, which brought her down into a state little differing from slavery, and reduced her people to outcasts on the hunting-grounds which had belonged to her fathers." It is not difficult to understand the effect of such stories on the minds of the young hearers. "After such tales, it required no small effort on Lois's part to go out, at her aunt's command, into the common pasture round the town, and bring the cattle home at night."

The novelist, apologising to some extent for the New Englanders and Indians, adds:

"Our English ancestors entertained superstitions of much the same character at the same period, and with less excuse, as the circumstances surrounding them were better known, and consequently more explicable by common sense, than the real mysteries of the deep, untrodden forests of New England. The gravest divines not only believed stories similar to that of the double-headed serpent, and other tales of witchcraft, but they made such narrations the subject of preaching and prayer; and, as cowardice makes us all cruel, men who were blameless in many of the relations of life, and even praiseworthy in some, became, from

superstition, cruel persecutors about this time, shewing no mercy towards anyone whom they believed to be in league with the Evil One."

How ready the people were to see signs of evil power, is noticeable in the account given by Pastor Nolan, of Elder Sherringham, which is not lacking in humour: "'As he entered into his house, full of dolour at the loss of his beast, a mouse ran in before him so sudden, that it almost tripped him up, though an instant before there was no such thing to be seen; and he caught at it with his shoe and hit it, and it cried out like a human creature in pain, and straight ran up the chimney, caring nothing for the hot flame and smoke.'"

In several respects the novelist follows the historical records of the witch murders at Salem very closely. One of the first to perish was Tituba, the Indian servant of the Rev. Mr. Parris, one of the ministers of Salem, between whom and a part of his congregation there had been a bitter feud. The other minister was George Burroughs, whom some desired to be the pastor instead of Mr. Parris. The Rev. Mr. Burroughs was first put in prison and then hanged for casting some doubt on the correctness of the prevailing view on witchcraft.

In *Lois the Witch* there are also two pastors, Mr. Tappau and Mr. Nolan. The congregation is divided in its allegiance, and Mr. Nolan is afterwards put to death. In the history of Salem, it is the daughter and the niece of the Rev. Mr. Parris who are affected mentally, and who are the cause of Tituba, the Indian servant, being put to death. In Mrs. Gaskell's story, it is the two daughters of Pastor Tappau who are first afflicted, and who charge their Indian servant, Hota, with being a witch. At Salem, Mr. Parris obtained a confession from the old Indian servant by

subjecting her to torture. In *Lois the Witch*, Mr. Tappau pursues the same method to obtain a confession.

The action of the clergy is the same in both accounts, and one writer has remarked: "Throughout the whole miserable business, the clergy were the most remorseless of the persecutors."

At Salem, the people were called together to consider the means to be adopted to protect themselves from witches, and the ministers took an active part on such occasions, as well as during the trials, in working on the feelings of the congregation to secure victims. No one was safe unless he fell in with the prevailing moods. It was at a public church meeting, called to find out the causes of some family afflictions, that Lois was charged by her own cousins with being a witch, and her public trial resembled in many respects similar scenes at Salem.

The novelist makes use of the public recantation of Judge Sewall in the South Meeting House at Boston, and she also incorporates in her story the actual published statement made by the Salem jurors:

"'We, whose names are undersigned, being, in the year 1692, called to serve as jurors in the court of Salem, on trial of many who were by some suspected guilty of doing acts of witchcraft upon the bodies of sundry persons; we confess that we ourselves were not capable to understand, not able to withstand, the mysterious delusions of the powers of darkness, and prince of the air, but were, for want of knowledge in ourselves, and better information from others, prevailed with to take up such evidence against the accused, as, on further consideration, and better information, we justly fear was insufficient for the touching of the lives of any (Deut. xvii. 6), whereby we feel we have been instrumental, with others, though ignorantly and unwittingly, to bring upon ourselves

and this people of the Lord the guilt of innocent blood; which sin, the Lord saith in Scripture, he would not pardon (2 Kings xxiv. 4), that is, we suppose, in regard of his temporal judgments. We do therefore signify to all in general (and to the surviving sufferers in special) our deep sense of, and sorrow for, our errors, in acting on such evidence to the condemning of any person; and do hereby declare, that we justly fear that we were sadly deluded and mistaken, for which we are much disquieted and distressed in our minds, and do therefore humbly beg forgiveness, first of God for Christ's sake, for this our error, and pray that God will not impute the guilt of it to ourselves nor others; and we do also pray that we may be considered candidly and aright by the living sufferers, as being then under the power of a strong and general delusion, utterly unacquainted with, and not experienced in, matters of that nature.

"'We do heartily ask forgiveness of you all, whom we have justly offended; and do declare, according to our present minds, we would none of us do such things again on such grounds for the whole world; praying you to accept of this in way of satisfaction for our offence, and that you would bless the inheritance of the Lord, that he may be entreated for the land.

"'*Foreman*, THOMAS FISK, etc.'"

These and other points of agreement between the recorded facts of history and the story, go to prove that the records of the witch fever at Salem were consulted before *Lois the Witch* was written.

The conclusion of the story is very touching, when, on the scaffold, we are told "Lois gazed wildly around, stretched out her arms as if to some person in the distance, who was yet visible to her, and cried out once, with a voice that thrilled through all who heard

it, 'Mother.' Directly afterwards, the body of Lois the Witch swung in the air; and everyone stood with hushed breath, with a sudden wonder, like a fear of deadly crime, fallen upon them."

Then we read: "The people of Salem had awakened from their frightful delusion . . . and in 1713, the sentence of excommunication against the witches of Salem was ordered, in godly sacramental meeting of the church, to be erased and blotted out," and that "those who met together for this purpose 'humbly requested the merciful God would pardon whatsoever sin, error, or mistake was in the application of justice, through our merciful High Priest, who knoweth how to have compassion on the ignorant, and those that are out of the way.'"

This is a quotation from a document which relates the incident at the end of the fearful witch murders in Salem.

According to the novelist, the 29th of April was set apart by Judge Sewall as a day of humiliation and repentance. Ralph Hickson, the betrothed of Lois Barclay, found it hard to forgive these religious fanatics. "'All this will not bring my Lois to life again, or give me back the hope of my youth.'" Yet when he comes to his better self, he joins hands across the sea, saying, "'What is the day, know you, that this justice set apart?' 'The twenty-ninth of April.'

"'Then, on that day, will I, here at Barford in England, join my prayers as long as I live with the repentant judge, that his sin may be blotted out and no more held in remembrance. *She* would have willed it so.'" It is interesting to know that Mrs. Gaskell used the pseudonym of Cotton Mather Mills in her first novel. This is somewhat strange, for we gather from her own account that Cotton Mather was not the type of man to be held in kindly remembrance.

CHAPTER VII

CHELSEA

(1827–1829)

ELIZABETH STEVENSON returns to Knutsford and then to her Home at Chelsea—Her Father's Second Marriage—Disappearance of her Brother, Lieutenant John Stevenson—Death of her Father—Chelsea days as portrayed in Mrs. Gaskell's Stories—Visit to her Uncle in Park Lane—Return to Knutsford.

ELIZABETH STEVENSON'S schooldays came to an end in the summer of 1827. She felt the change from a large household to the quiet home at Knutsford and then to the sad one at Chelsea, and she left school with much regret.

The methodical school life had developed her intellectual faculties, and she had gained in knowledge as well as experience. Writing of this change in her life in *My Lady Ludlow*, Mrs. Gaskell narrates that, on leaving Lady Ludlow, "I told her how happy my years had been, while passed under her roof, but that now I had begun to wonder whether I had not duties elsewhere . . . and whether the fulfilment of these duties, quiet ones they must needs be . . . would not prevent my sinking into the querulous habit of thinking and talking, into which I found myself occasionally falling."

All through her life, she disliked uprooting old associations, and her sensitive nature shrank from necessary changes, though she never hesitated to follow what she felt to be the path of duty.

"When one period of life is about to be shut up for ever, we are sure to look back upon it with fond regret, so I, happy enough in my future prospects, could not avoid recurring to all the days of my life

in the Hall, from the time when I came to it, a shy, awkward girl, scarcely past childhood, to now, when, a grown woman, I was looking forward to leaving my lady's house (as a residence) for ever. As it has turned out, I never saw her or it again. Like a piece of sea-wreck, I have drifted away from those days; quiet, happy, eventless days—very happy to remember."

She was now seventeen, and her father decided that the time had arrived when she should return to his home. He seems to have had a longing for his daughter's company.

Although devoted to her father, Elizabeth had not had many opportunities of taking her place as his daughter; an occasional visit to Chelsea when she was a little girl, and her father's letters to her when she was old enough to read them formed the only link.

As Mr. Stevenson married again when his daughter was only four years old, and had two other children, a son named William and a daughter Catherine, the home at Chelsea with the stepmother and her two children was as a stranger's house compared with her aunt's home at Knutsford.

There was a family connection between the stepmother and the Misses Byerley, whom Elizabeth had just left at Stratford-on-Avon. Mr. Stevenson's second wife was Catherine Thomson, daughter of Alexander Thomson, and her brother, Dr. Anthony Todd Thomson, a well-known London physician, married the youngest sister of the Misses Byerley. It was this Mrs. Thomson who wrote under the name of Grace Wharton, and her son, John Cockburn Thomson, also became a writer, using the *nom de guerre* of Philip Wharton. Mr. Stevenson's own mother was Isabella Thomson, and it is said that these Thomsons were related in a remote degree.

It was just about the time when Elizabeth was leaving school that her only brother John, a naval lieutenant, mysteriously disappeared at sea, on his voyage in an East Indiaman. This probably decided her father to send for her to come to Chelsea, for the loss of his eldest son was a great grief to him, and his health was now beginning to fail.

Before going home, Elizabeth Stevenson paid a visit to her relatives at Knutsford. She then joined her father at 3, Beaufort Row, Chelsea. Mr. Stevenson superintended his daughter's studies in Latin, French, and Italian, which she continued after leaving school. Her favourite authors at this time were said to be Goldsmith, Cowper, Pope, and Scott.

Mr. Stevenson was far from being a wealthy man, and as it would be necessary to make some provision for his wife and her two young children, his eldest daughter's greatest asset in earning her own living would be a good education. It was probably with this in mind, that Mr. Stevenson encouraged Elizabeth to keep up her studies and prepare herself for being a governess, in the event of his death.

Mr. Stevenson made his will in 1827, and in it he mentions all his children by name, John, Elizabeth Cleghorn, William, and Catherine, as well as his wife. When he died, two years later, the amount realised was very much less than had been expected, so that his daughter had to choose between her own resources or dependence upon her relatives and friends. The latter became her lot.

From 1827 to 1829 were probably the most trying years of Mrs. Gaskell's life. Concerning this time, she says she was "very, very unhappy," and she speaks of "her child's heart being ready to break." She tells of "the inexplicable comfort" she derived from the sight of the river Thames, which flowed past

the end of the Beaufort Row, and she mentions a family of the name of Kenneth, who lived at 13, Beaufort Row, and were very kind to her. Evidently she was sad and lonely in the earlier part of this stay at Beaufort Row. Her father's health gradually gave way, and he died of paralysis, after a long and painful illness, on March 22nd, 1829. He was buried on March 27th in St. Luke's burial ground, King's Road, Chelsea, an additional burial place to the old parish church of Chelsea, which has only a very small churchyard.

Elizabeth had helped to nurse him, and it was a great comfort to her afterwards to feel that she had been able to be a solace to him during his last days.

In *My French Master*, largely an autobiographical story, which was published in *Household Words* on December 17th and 24th, 1853, Mrs. Gaskell writes:

"That winter was full of incidents in our home. As it often happens when a family had seemed stationary and secure from change for years, and then at least one important event happens, another is sure to follow. . . . My father was stricken down from health into confirmed invalidism, by a paralytic stroke . . . and my interests were confined to the fluctuating reports of a sick room. I did not care for the foreign intelligence which was shaking Europe with an universal tremor. My hopes, my fears were centred in one frail human body—my dearly beloved, my most loving father."

Later in *My French Master* appeared a reference to a visit to her mother's grave:

"One Sunday in that August I went to church. It was many weeks since I had been able to leave my father for so long a time before. Since I had been last there to worship, it seemed as if my youth had

passed away—gone without a warning—leaving no trace behind.

"After service, I went through the long grass to the unfrequented part of the churchyard where my dear mother lay buried."

In *North and South* we have a very pathetic death-bed scene, where Margaret Hale nurses her mother and tries to comfort her. Margaret Hale has long been recognised as a prototype of Elizabeth Stevenson, and in writing this story she has undoubtedly drawn largely upon her own experience whilst at Chelsea. Though Margaret Hale speaks of her mother, the reference fits the case of Elizabeth Stevenson and her father:

"'Mamma was getting to love me so! And I was getting to understand her. And now comes death to snap us asunder!'" In another part of the story, the novelist speaks of Margaret as not yet twenty, and as one "who had to bear up against such hard pressure that she felt quite old."

The recollection of that dark time in her father's sick room at Chelsea was evidently with her.

"'Margaret, if I can get better—if God lets me have a chance of recovery, it must be through seeing my son Frederick once more. It will waken up all the poor springs of health left in me.'"

This reference is to Elizabeth Stevenson's sailor brother, of whom no tidings could be gained. He never returned, and his father died without knowing the fate of his son.

Just as Margaret was the mainstay of the household after her mother's death, we can readily believe that Elizabeth Stevenson would be a great help in the bereaved household. All through her life, her Bible was an unspeakable comfort to her, and in her darkest days she derived much consolation from its pages.

"The night was wearing away, and the day was at hand, when, without a word of preparation, Margaret's voice broke upon the stillness of the room, with a clearness of sound that startled even herself.

"'Let not your heart be troubled,' it said; and she went steadily on through all that chapter of unspeakable consolation."

In another story she says: "We would rather have had our dead alive, would we not? and there is nothing in money that can comfort us for their loss; but you know who has appointed all our times to die."

These times of parting with loved ones left a deep impression on Mrs. Gaskell's mind, and she must have proved a great comfort to many of the poor in Manchester when they were "crossing the bar," for she gave sympathy out of her own experience of life.

In speaking of the poor at such a time, she says: "The thoughts of illness and death seem to turn many of us into gentlemen and gentlewomen, as long as such thoughts are in our minds. We cannot speak loudly or angrily at such times; we are not apt to be eager about mere worldly things, for our very awe at our quickened sense of the nearness of the invisible world makes us calm and serene about the paltry trifles of to-day."

St. Luke's burial ground is but a short distance from Beaufort Row, and no doubt it was the recollection of her father's funeral at Chelsea which enabled Mrs. Gaskell to describe a similar experience in *My Lady Ludlow*, in which Margaret's father is a clergyman.

"My father had spent the best part of his manhood in labouring hard, body and soul, for the people among whom he lived. His family, of course, claimed the first place in his heart; he would have been good for

little, even in the way of benevolence, if they had not. But close after them, he cared for his parishioners and neighbours. And yet, when he died, though the church-bell tolled and smote upon our hearts, with hard, fresh pain at every beat, the sounds of every-day life still went on, close pressing around us—carts and carriages, street cries, distant barrel-organs (the kindly neighbours kept them out of our street), life, active, noisy life, pressed on our acute consciousness of Death, and jarred upon it as on a quick nerve.

"And when we went to church . . . though the pulpit cushions were black, and many of the congregation had put on some humble sign of mourning, yet it did not alter the whole material aspect of the place."

Elizabeth Stevenson had now lost both her parents, and her life seemed to be at the parting of the ways. She was past her youth, and could think and act for herself. Her sheltered girlhood lay behind her, and, although her relatives were all kind, and some of them were wealthy and anxious to give her a home, she had come to a time when, to use her own words, "Thinking has many a time made me sad, but doing never did in all my life. My theory is a sort of parody on the maxim of 'Get money, my son—honestly if you can; but get money.' My precept is, 'Do something . . . do good if you can; but, at any rate, do something.'"

After her father's funeral, she stayed for a while with her maternal uncle, Mr. Swinton Holland, in Park Lane, a home which figures in the opening chapters of *North and South*, though it is there located as in Harley Street.

Here, at nineteen, she, as Margaret Hale, tells of her former visit to her relations at Park Lane.

"Margaret looked round upon the nursery; the first room in that house with which she had become

familiar nine years ago, when she was brought, all untamed from the forest, to share the home, the play and the lessons of her cousin Edith. She remembered the dark, dim look of the London nursery, presided over by an austere and ceremonious nurse, who was terribly particular about clean hands and torn frocks. She recollected the first tea up there—separated from her father and aunt, who were dining somewhere down below, an infinite depth of stairs; for, unless she were up in the sky (the child thought), they must be deep down in the bowels of the earth. At home —before she came to live in Harley Street—her mother's dressing-room had been her nursery; and, as they kept early hours in the country parsonage, Margaret had always had her meals with her father and mother.

"The little Margaret had hushed her sobs, and tried to lie quiet as if asleep, for fear of making her father unhappy by her grief, which she dared not express before her aunt, and which she rather thought it wrong to feel at all after the long hoping and planning, and contriving they had gone through at home, before her wardrobe could be arranged so as to suit her grander circumstances."

And then comes the visit in 1829, after which she left London for Knutsford, not returning again until after her marriage in 1832.

"Now she had got to love the old nursery, though it was but a dismantled place; and she looked all round, with a kind of cat-like regret at the idea of leaving it for ever in three days."

Her stepmother left No. 3, Beaufort Row in the September after Mr. Stevenson's death, and Elizabeth Stevenson was welcomed at Knutsford by Mrs. Lumb, who was delighted to receive her "daughter" once more.

Mrs. Lumb was considered to be comparatively wealthy, and when she died, which was not until eight years later, she left the interest on half of her money to her niece, Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell. This was increased eleven years later, when her Aunt Abigail died. It is probable that if Elizabeth had not married, she would have received the whole, which would have enabled her to live in the substantial house on the heath-side at Knutsford as a lady of independent means.

CHAPTER VIII

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE

(1829–1831)

BRIEF Stay in London—Visit to Newcastle—Rev. William Turner—*Ruth*—The Minister's Home—The Minister's Servant—Hanover Square Chapel—Home Life at Newcastle—Public Opinion with regard to *Ruth's* Conduct—Closing Scenes in *Ruth*—Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot on *Ruth*.

AFTER her father's death on March 22nd, 1829, Elizabeth Stevenson did not remain long with her stepmother at 3 Beaufort Row, Chelsea, but went, as we have seen, to her uncle, Mr. Swinton Holland, in Park Lane. She was also a frequent visitor at the home of her cousin, Sir Henry Holland, who lived at 25, Lower Brook Street, not far from Park Lane. It was in these homes that she acquired the knowledge which enabled her to write the delightful sketches of London drawing-room life in the early part of the nineteenth century, so well described in *North and South*. Sir Henry Holland was at the height of his popularity, and it is said that at this time he was the friend and adviser of every man of note, so that he would probably be consulted with regard to Elizabeth Stevenson's future. It was probably he who suggested the visit which she paid in the autumn of 1829 to his old tutor, the Rev. William Turner, M.A., of Newcastle-on-Tyne, that she might prepare herself, if necessary, for earning her own living. In *Recollections of My Past Life*, Sir Henry Holland says: "Having entered my eleventh year, I went to Newcastle-on-Tyne as the pupil of the Rev. William Turner, and in his home and under the care of this

excellent man I resided for four years. Those four years were marked by a fair amount of bodily and mental activity. There was very little restraint on me, quiet instruction, and a cheerful home. I left Newcastle-on-Tyne in 1803."

Elizabeth Stevenson did not travel direct from London to Newcastle, but paid a brief visit to her aunt Lumb at Knutsford, where she received a most cordial welcome after her long absence. Why she did not stay with her aunt permanently seems strange, but she was now nineteen, and after her two years at school, succeeded by the two years in Chelsea working at her studies, she may have preferred to qualify herself for earning her own living.

The Rev. William Turner was a remarkable man, a minister of the third generation. His father was the Unitarian minister at Allostock, near Knutsford, and his grandfather, the Rev. John Turner, was once the minister at Knutsford from 1735–1737. The Rev. William Turner was for fifty-eight years the Unitarian minister at the chapel of the Divine Unity in Hanover Square, and afterwards at the new building in Bridge Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne. Of the thirteen ministers who have had charge of the Unitarian Church at Newcastle from its commencement in 1676, no fewer than eight are mentioned in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Referring to this, Mr. Welford, a local historian of Newcastle, says : " It may, indeed, be doubted whether any other congregation can find so large a proportion of its ministers in that great Valhalla of British worthies. Pre-eminence in the pulpit begets pre-eminence in the pew, and Mr. Turner counted as members of his congregation the majority of the literary and scientific men of Newcastle, including editors, writers, teachers, lawyers, and also the public officials and magistrates of the town."

REV. WILLIAM TURNER, M.A.

George Stephenson, the renowned engineer, who was a native of a village near Newcastle, wrote :

" Mr. Turner was always ready to assist me with books, with instruments, and with counsel, gratuitously and cheerfully. He gave me the most valuable assistance and instruction ; and to my dying day I can never forget the obligations which I owe to my venerable friend."

Nonconformist ministers at this time often combined teaching and preaching, and for many years Mr. Turner was the headmaster of a school in Percy Street, afterwards known as the famous Bruce's School or Percy Street Academy, opposite the old Haymarket. It was in 1799 that Henry Holland became a pupil of Mr. Turner's, remaining with him as a private student until 1803. Mr. Turner had ceased to have charge of the school in 1802. He had for some years been a paid lecturer in Natural and Experimental Philosophy at the Literary and Philosophical Society, Newcastle. Mr. Turner thus became Elizabeth Stevenson's guardian for two years. He was sixty-two years of age, and twenty-six years had elapsed since he had had the care of young Henry Holland, but he was still a very energetic man, and was able to give guidance and help to Elizabeth Stevenson at this important period of her life.

Mr. Turner was related to Elizabeth Stevenson through his first wife, Mary Holland, daughter of Thomas Holland, of Manchester, who was Mrs. Stevenson's cousin. His second wife was the daughter of the Rev. William Willet, of Newcastle-under-Lyne, a sister of Dr. Peter Holland's first wife Mary, and niece of Josiah Wedgwood. This Mary Holland was Elizabeth Stevenson's aunt by marriage. Thus Elizabeth Stevenson was doubly related to Mr. Turner. In addition to his ministerial and scholastic

duties, he was the Secretary of the First Schoolmasters' Association in the Newcastle district. He also started a branch of the British and Foreign Bible Society, was the secretary and one of the founders of the Literary and Philosophical Society in Newcastle, and was the secretary of the Unitarian Ministers Widows and Orphans' Society. It was he who started the first Sunday School in Newcastle, in 1784. With all these extraneous duties, he may have found Elizabeth Stevenson of some service in relieving him of a portion of the clerical work connected with his various organisations, just as she helped her father during his long illness.

Much that concerned Ruth in those early days at Eccleston was drawn from the novelist's early experience at Newcastle. "By degrees they spoke of education and the book learning that forms one part of it; and the result was that Ruth determined to get up early all through the bright summer mornings to acquire the knowledge." Whilst at Newcastle, Elizabeth Stevenson made use of every opportunity of improving herself, and it is said that, like Charlotte Brontë, she thought of teaching as the one means of earning a livelihood.

"She had refined taste and excellent sense and judgment to separate the true from the false. With these qualities, she set to work under Mr. Benson's directions. She read in the early morning the books that he marked out; she trained herself with strict perseverance to do all thoroughly. . . . Those summer mornings were happy, for she was learning neither to look backwards nor forwards, but to live faithfully and earnestly in the present. She rose while the hedge-sparrow was yet singing his *réveil* to his mate; she dressed and opened her window. . . . Then she would gaze awhile out of the high upper window on

to the moorlands, that swelled in waves one behind the other in the grey, cool morning light. These were her occasioned relaxations, and after them she returned with strength to her work."

Mrs. Gaskell always prized the early mornings for her best work. After her marriage she often stayed at a farm in Silverdale, during her summer holidays, when writing her books, and the farmer's wife, who was the niece of Mrs. Gaskell's landlady, remarked: "She was always an early riser, and used to get up and write long before the farm servants went to their labours." These precious morning hours were often the only time that Mrs. Gaskell could snatch from her busy life for literary work.

In *Ruth*, where Mr. Turner is the original of Thurstan Benson, the novelist writes: "Mr. Benson had sometimes taught the children of different people as an especial favour, when requested by them. But then his pupils were only children, and by their progress he was little prepared for Ruth's. She had had early teaching, of that kind which need never be unlearnt, from her mother; enough to unfold many of her powers; they had remained inactive now for several years, but had grown strong in the dark and quiet time. Her tutor was surprised at the bounds by which she surmounted obstacles, the quick perception and ready adaptation of truths and first principles, and her immediate sense of the fitness of things. Her delight in what was strong and beautiful called out her master's sympathy; but, most of all, he admired the complete unconsciousness of uncommon power, or unusual progress. It was less of a wonder that he considered it to be, it is true, for she never thought of comparing what she was now with her former self, much less with another. Indeed, she did not think of herself at all. . . ."

If Elizabeth's name is substituted for Ruth's, this tells Mrs. Gaskell's own story at that time. Part of her time in Mr. Turner's home was occupied in preparing herself for her future career, and, as in Ruth's case, after the first year, she may have taken up teaching as a means of livelihood, for in this small household there would be little for her to do, unless she had duties which were outside the home, or, as previously stated, she acted as secretary to Mr. Turner.

"Life had become significant and full of duty to her. She delighted in the exercise of her intellectual powers, and liked the idea of the infinite amount of which she was ignorant; for it was a grand pleasure to learn—to crave, and be satisfied. She strove to forget what had gone before this last twelve months. She shuddered up from contemplating it; it was like a bad, unholy dream." This may refer to the death of her father and the hard days at 3, Beaufort Row. There is a description of Ruth's duties as a daily governess, which concludes with a retrospect:

"At nine she was to be at Mr. Bradshaw's house. She sat in the room with Mary and Elizabeth during the Latin, the writing, and arithmetic lessons, which they received from masters; then she read, and walked with them, clinging to her as an elder sister; she dined with her pupils at the family lunch, and reached home by four. That happy home—those quiet days!"

There is a tale told to-day of Mr. Turner which is characteristic, for he was noted in Newcastle for his absent-mindedness and generosity to the poor. Beggars and tramps, who were more common in the "thirties" than now, knew the kind-hearted minister, and they would stop him in the street and tell a pitiful tale, which was generally successful in obtaining assistance. They would then take another route

and meet him again in a very short time, and by relating a still more pathetic story, open his heart and also his purse for a second time. Mr. Turner's kind feeling for the poor was in the novelist's mind when she described Thurstan Benson in *Ruth*.

On a headstone which has replaced an old weather-beaten one in St. Andrew's churchyard, the oldest church in Newcastle, is a list of several members of his family buried there. Two of his sons became ministers, whilst his elder daughter married the Rev. John Gooch Robberds, of Manchester, the senior colleague of the Rev. William Gaskell, and lived not far from Dover Street, where Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell afterwards came to live. It was in this daughter's home that Mr. Turner died in 1859, aged ninety-seven years.

His funeral sermon was preached in Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester, by the husband of his former pupil, the Rev. William Gaskell, in the course of which he related the following:

"Long before I ever saw him I remember hearing an anecdote from a gentleman who had been visiting Newcastle-on-Tyne among Unitarian friends. A lady, belonging to an orthodox church, was dwelling with warm praise on Mr. Turner's excellencies in the presence of her own minister, who had but recently come to the town. He broke in upon her praise with: 'But you do not expect to see him in heaven!' 'No,' she half-sadly said, 'I confess I do not. He will be too much in the light of the throne for me to see him.'" Probably this was in the novelist's mind, when she said of Ruth, "She will be in the light of God's countenance, when you and I will be standing afar off."

Mr. Turner was a cultured scholar, and he has left his mark on Newcastle by his good works as a citizen,

as well as by his faithful ministry. His engraved portrait still occupies an honoured place in the homes of several Novocastrians. There are also a fine oil painting and marble bust of Mr. Turner in the rooms of the Literary and Philosophical Society. His public lectures numbered over six hundred, and covered a wide range, including many scientific as well as philosophical subjects. Mr. Turner's influences helped to mould the truly religious character that is always associated with Mrs. Gaskell.

At the time of the novelist's visit to Newcastle in 1829, Mr. Turner was living with his unmarried daughter Ann, who was the youngest of a large family, and about thirty-three years of age. It was in this home that Mrs. Gaskell found much of her material for *Ruth*. She spoke of it as her Newcastle story, because in it is woven so much of her own life when staying with Mr. Turner and his daughter. The story is a perfect mosaic so far as the descriptive parts are concerned. At one time the novelist describes the modest minister's house at Newcastle just as it was when she lived there. At another time she describes the old chapel at Knutsford and the lane leading from the old farm at Sandlebridge. Then the reader is wafted to Festiniog in North Wales, and from there is taken to Newcastle again. Later on, the scene is transferred to Silverdale on Morecambe Bay, which is known in the novel as Abermouth, and at the conclusion of the story Ruth dies in the little attic in Mr. Turner's house at Newcastle.

Mrs. Gaskell wrote a good part of the story at Silverdale, and she had to depend very largely upon her memory for the Newcastle portion, which was written twenty-four years after she left Mr. Turner's home.

The illness of Bellingham at the inn in North Wales

suggests the anxiety which Mrs. Gaskell went through during the illness of her children, who had scarlet fever when there in 1844. This sad time was never long absent from Mrs. Gaskell's thoughts, and she refers to it again and again.

" He led the way into a large, bow-windowed room, which looked gloomy enough that afternoon, but which I have seen bright and buoyant with youth and hope within, and sunny lights creeping down the purple mountain slope, and stealing over the green, soft meadows, till they reached the little garden, full of roses and lavender bushes, lying close under the window. I have seen—but I shall see no more."

Her little boy Willie died in 1844, and in the earlier part of *Ruth* she seems to live over again her ten months of happy pride in her only son when telling of Ruth's baby boy. The mother's divine love of her little son shines through her words as she writes of the baby.

" Little child ! thy angel was with God, and drew her nearer and nearer to Him whose face is continually beheld by the angels of little children. . . . It might be superstition—I daresay it was—but, somehow, she never lay down to rest without saying, as she looked her last on her boy, ' Thy will, not mine, be done.' "

In none of her stories are felt the beatings of the mother's heart so truly as in *Ruth*. None but a mother could have written such a merciful story, and when she is writing of babies, she writes from her own experience. She had a firm belief in the humanising influence of a little child, and this is shown when writing of Miss Benson, who did not welcome Ruth's baby very cordially, though afterwards the child found its way to her heart.

" Taking Miss Benson's reluctant hand, she placed one of her fingers in his grasp. That baby touch

called out her love ; the doors of her heart were thrown open wide for the little infant to go in and take possession."

Mr. Turner was the original of Thurstan Benson, and Faith Benson was founded on the minister's daughter Ann. The minister's home in *Ruth*, which the novelist describes so minutely, was very similar to Mr. Turner's home as Elizabeth Stevenson found it in 1829. It was a household of three : the minister, his daughter, and the typical North country servant. Mrs. Gaskell calls the place Eccleston, and gives an interesting description in *Ruth* as it appeared when she arrived at the Turf Hotel, in Collingwood Street, Newcastle, in the old coaching days of 1829. This is probably a remembrance of an actual journey by coach from Manchester to Newcastle, which Elizabeth Stevenson made with Mr. Turner and his daughter when returning from Mr. Robberds' home in Manchester.

" A low grey cloud was the first sign of Eccleston ; it was the smoke of the town hanging over the plain. Beyond the place where she was expected to believe it existed, arose round, waving uplands ; nothing to the fine outlines of the Welsh mountains, but still going up nearer to Heaven than the rest of the flat world which she had now entered. Rumbling stones, lamp-posts, a sudden stop, and they were in the town of Eccleston. . . . The street was so quiet, that their footsteps sounded like a loud disturbance, and announced their approach as effectually as the ' trumpet's lordly blare ' did the coming of Abdallah."

By this time they had reached the home that was then known as 13, Cumberland Row, outside the walls of the city of Newcastle, which had left a lasting impression on the young traveller.

" The little narrow passage was cleared, and Miss

Benson took Ruth into the sitting-room. There were only two sitting-rooms on the ground-floor, one behind the other. Out of the back room the kitchen opened, and for this reason the back parlour was used as the family sitting-room; or else, being, with its garden aspect, so much the pleasanter of the two, both Sally and Miss Benson would have appropriated it for Mr. Benson's study. As it was, the front room, which looked to the street, was his room; and many a person coming for help—help of which giving money was the lowest kind—was admitted, and let forth by Mr. Benson, unknown to anyone else in the house.

"To make amends for his having the least cheerful room on the ground floor, he had the garden bedroom, while his sister slept over his study. There were two rooms again over those, with sloping ceilings, though otherwise large and airy. The attic looking into the garden was the spare bedroom; while the front belonged to Sally. There was no room over the kitchen, which was, in fact, a supplement to the house. The sitting-room was called by the pretty, old-fashioned name of the parlour, while Mr. Benson's room was styled the study. The curtains were drawn in the parlour; there was a bright fire and a clean hearth; indeed, exquisite cleanliness seemed the very spirit of the household, for the door which was open to the kitchen showed a delicately white and spotless floor, and bright glittering tins, on which the ruddy firelight danced."

The house is still standing, but the neighbourhood has changed, and the road is now one of the busiest parts of the town, and the house is let in tenements, a shop being built in the forecourt. Ruth's first night at Eccleston suggests Elizabeth Stevenson's experience during the first night at Newcastle: "Many a time did she rise, and go to the long casement

window, and looked abroad over the still and quiet town—over the grey stone walls, and chimneys, and old high-pointed roofs—on to the far-away hilly line of the horizon, lying calm under the bright moonshine. It was late in the morning when she woke from her long-deferred slumbers; and when she went downstairs, she found Mr. and Miss Benson awaiting her in the parlour. That homely, pretty, old-fashioned little room! How bright and still and clean it looked! The window (all the windows at the back of the house were casements) was open, to let in the sweet morning air, and streaming eastern sunshine. The long jessamine sprays, with their white, scented stars, forced themselves almost into the room. The little square garden beyond, with grey stone walls all round, was rich and mellow in its autumnal colouring, running from deep crimson hollyhocks up to amber and gold nasturtiums, and all toned down by the clear and delicate air. It was so still, that the gossamer webs, laden with dew, did not tremble or quiver in the least; but the sun was drawing to himself the sweet incense of many flowers, and the parlour was scented with the odours of mignonette and stocks. Miss Benson was arranging a bunch of China and damask roses in an old-fashioned jar; they lay, all dewy and fresh, on the white breakfast-cloth when Ruth entered. Mr. Benson was reading in some large folio.

"With gentle morning speech they greeted her; but the quiet repose of the scene was instantly broken by Sally popping in from the kitchen and glancing at Ruth with sharp reproach. She said, 'I reckon I may bring in the breakfast now?' with a strong emphasis on the last word."

Elizabeth's experience of the first day at Newcastle would probably be much as she describes it in *Ruth*.

"All day long she had that feeling, common to

HOME OF THE REV. WILLIAM TURNER, M.A., 1829

those who go to stay at a fresh house among comparative strangers : a feeling of the necessity that she should become accustomed to the new atmosphere in which she was placed before she could move and act freely ; it was, indeed, a purer ether, a diviner air, which she was breathing in now, than what she had been accustomed to for long months."

The modest house described by Mrs. Gaskell in *Ruth* compares exactly with Mr. Turner's home at 13, Cumberland Row, but the garden has gone. Only the " yard " and the broken wall which surrounds it are there to tell of the pretty garden which the novelist describes so graphically, and which she loved so much in her Newcastle days. The house is now let to two tenants, and for that reason the door which led to the kitchen through the parlour has been blocked up and a way made from the passage to a new kitchen. The windows have been altered, but, from the back attic, which, according to *Ruth*, was the spare bedroom, and would be the one occupied by Elizabeth Stevenson, can be seen the town, " over the grey stone walls and chimneys and old, high-pointed roofs —on to the far-away hilly line of the horizon." The old grey walls referred to are part of the wall built by Severus, and formed a portion of the old wall of the town of Newcastle. The hills in the near distance are the Rothbury Hills, and on a clear day it is possible from that very attic window to see the Cheviot Hills, sometimes snow-capped, in the long distance. The district has greatly changed, even the name of Cumberland Row has gone.

There are three other houses associated with Mr. Turner's name, but they deal with another period. The old Cumberland Row is now part of a very long thoroughfare called Westgate Road, a portion of the old Roman road leading on to Carlisle.

Mrs. Gaskell gives a picture of the North country servant, which was drawn from the same original that Miss Galindo was so fond of scolding in *My Lady Ludlow*.

The Bensons' familiar chats with Sally are probably drawn from life, and they gave Mrs. Gaskell a chance to display her kindly humour. The master's and the servant's interests were identical in that God-fearing home of the Turners on Tyneside, and the same spirit existed in Mrs. Gaskell's household in after years. Sally's version of the wages question is given in Mrs. Gaskell's inimitable, humorous style :

" ' You'll not go for to think now that I've not more than three pound a year. I've a deal above that now,' says Sally to Ruth. 'First of all, old missus gave me four pound, for she said I were worth it, and I thought in my heart that I were ; so I took it without more ado ; but after her death, Master Thurstan and Miss Faith took a fit of spending, and says they to me, one day, as I carried tea in, "Sally, we think your wages ought to be raised." "What matter do you think !" said I, pretty sharp, for I thought they'd ha' shown more respect to missus, if they'd let things stand as they were in her time ; and they'd gone and moved the sofa away from the wall to where it stands now, already that very day. So I speaks up sharp, and says I, "As long as I'm content, I think it's no business of yours to be meddling wi' me and my money matters." "But," says Miss Faith (she's always the one to speak first if you'll notice, though it's master that comes in and clinches the matter with some reason she'd never ha' thought of—he were always a sensible lad), " Sally, all the servants in the town have six pound and better, and you have as hard a place as any of 'em." " Did you ever hear me grumble about my work, that you talk about it in

that way ? Wait till I grumble," says I, " but don't meddle wi' me till then." So I flung off in a huff ; but in the course of the evening, Master Thurstan came in and sat down in the kitchen, and he's such winning ways, he wiles one over to anything ; and, besides, a notion had come into my head—now you'll not tell,' said she, glancing round the room, and hitching her chair nearer to Ruth in a confidential manner ; Ruth promised, and Sally went on : ' I thought I should like to be an heiress wi' money, and leave it all to Master and Miss Faith ; and I thought if I'd six pound a year, I could, maybe, get to be an heiress ; all I was feared on was some chap or other might marry me for my money, but I've managed to keep the fellows off ; so I looks mim and grateful, and I thanks Master Thurstan for his offer, and I takes the wages ; and what do you think I've done ? ' asked Sally, with an exultant air. ' What have you done ? ' asked Ruth. ' Why,' replied Sally, slowly and emphatically, ' I've saved thirty pound ! but that's not it. I've getten a lawyer to make me a will, . . . witnessed according to law, and all. Master Thurstan will be prettily taken in when I die, and he finds all his extra wage left back to him. But it will teach him it's not so easy as he thinks for, to make a woman give up her way. ' "

Hanover Square Chapel is the usual name given to the Unitarian place of worship which Elizabeth Stevenson attended when at Newcastle. It is more correctly described as The Church of the Divine Unity. The building is now used partly as a motor garage and the remainder as a tobacco manufactory. In *Ruth* Mrs. Gaskell has not described Hanover Square Chapel, which, although commodious, was very far from being picturesque, but she has faithfully drawn the beautiful old Brook Street Chapel at

Knutsford, with which she was so familiar in her girlhood. The description is true to the letter even to-day, for, fortunately, the building has not been modernised.

"The chapel was up a narrow street, or rather *cul-de-sac*, close by. It stood on the outskirts of the town, almost in fields. It was built about the time of Matthew and Philip Henry, when the Dissenters were afraid of attracting attention or observation, and hid their places of worship in obscure and out-of-the-way parts of the towns in which they were built. Accordingly, it often happened, as in the present case, that the buildings immediately surrounding, as well as the chapels themselves, looked as if they carried you back to a period a hundred and fifty years ago. The chapel had a picturesque and old-world look, for luckily the congregation had been too poor to rebuild it, or new-face it, in George the Third's time. The staircases which led to the galleries were outside, at each end of the building, and the irregular roof and worn stone steps looked grey and stained by time and weather. The grassy hillocks, each with a little upright headstone, were shaded by a grand old wych-elm. A lilac bush or two, a white rose-tree, and a few laburnums, all old and gnarled enough, were planted round the chapel yard; and the casement windows of the chapel were made of heavy-leaded, diamond-shaped panes, almost covered with ivy, producing a green gloom not without its solemnity, within. This ivy was the home of an infinite number of little birds, which twittered and warbled, till it might have been thought that they were emulous of the power of praise possessed by the human creatures within, with such earnest, long-drawn strains did this crowd of winged songsters rejoice and be glad in their beautiful gift of life. The interior of the building

UNITARIAN CHAPEL, KNUTSFORD

was plain and simple, as plain and simple could be. When it was fitted up, oak timber was much cheaper than it is now, so the woodwork was all of that description ; but roughly hewed, for the early builders had not much wealth to spare. The walls were white-washed, and were recipients of the shadows of the beauty without ; on their ' white plains ' the tracery of the ivy might be seen, now still, now stirred by the sudden flight of some little bird."

This was the chapel where Elizabeth Stevenson worshipped as a girl, and it is in the graveyard surrounding it that she is buried. The place lends itself to descriptive portraiture far better than the plain old Hanover Square Chapel of her Newcastle days. In the baptismal registers of Hanover Square Chapel, which were used in Mr. Turner's time, are the names of his seven children, and also that of Margaret Emily Gaskell, daughter of William and Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, of Manchester. The date of the baptism is seven months after the date of birth. That daughter is still living in the old home at Plymouth Grove, Manchester, and is still keeping up the delightful associations which made her parents' house a centre of light and learning.

The novelist wrote at the christening of Ruth's baby : " In that body of Dissenters to which Mr. Benson belonged, it is not considered necessary to baptize infants as early as the ceremony can be performed ; and many circumstances concurred to cause the solemn thanksgiving and dedication of the child (for so these Dissenters looked upon christenings) to be deferred until it was probably somewhere about six months old."

Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were visiting at Mr. Turner's home when their daughter was christened, but the house in which he then lived was not the one where

Elizabeth Stevenson had passed her two happy years preparing for her future career. Mr. Turner removed from 13, Cumberland Row to what was then called 2, Albion Street, now altered into Leases Park Road. The beautiful account of the evening of the day of Leonard's christening shows Mrs. Gaskell's great motherly heart which shone through all her stories. It is in thoughts associated with little children, which can only spring from the true maternal breast, that Mrs. Gaskell so completely outshines Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot when writing of children.

"The peacefulness of the time, the window open into the little garden, the scents that came stealing in, and the clear heaven above, made the time to be remembered as a happy festival."

This may well be the actual happy recollection of the christening by Mr. Turner of Mrs. Gaskell's own little daughter at Newcastle on September 28th, 1837.

It is possible that the closing scene in Ruth's funeral sermon was drawn from an actual experience in the chapel at Hanover Square.

"Mr. Benson's heart grew very full. His voice trembled as he read and prayed. But he steadied it as he opened his sermon—his great, last effort in her honour—the labour that he had prayed God to bless to the hearts of many. For an instant, the old man looked on all the upturned faces, listening with wet eyes, to hear what he could say to interpret that which was in their hearts, dumb and unshaped, of God's doings, as shown in her life. He looked and, as he gazed, a mist came before him, and he could not see his sermon, nor his hearers, but only Ruth, as she had been—stricken low, and crouching from sight in the upland field by Llan-dhu—like a woeful, hunted creature."

In the chapter of *Ruth*, headed "The Dissenting

Minister's Household," is a beautiful description of a godly home, which is based upon that of the Rev. William Turner, for his character is still remembered in Newcastle for those very qualities attributed to the minister in Mrs. Gaskell's novel. Speaking of her master and Miss Benson, Sally, the servant, says: " 'I never think of them as Church or Dissenters, but just as Christians.' "

And Ruth says: " 'In the Bensons' house there was the same unconsciousness of individual merit, the same absence of introspection and analysis of motive, as there had been in her mother, but it seemed that their lives were pure and good, not merely from a lovely and beautiful nature, but from some law, the obedience to which was, of itself, harmonious peace, and which governed them almost implicitly, and with as little questioning on their part, as the glorious stars which haste not, rest not, in their eternal obedience. This household had many failings; they were but human, and, with all their loving desire to bring their lives into harmony with the will of God, they often erred and fell short; but, somehow, the very errors and faults of one individual served to call out higher excellencies in another, and so they reacted upon each other, and the result of short discords was exceeding harmony and peace. But they had themselves no idea of the real state of things; they did not trouble themselves with marking their progress by self-examination; if Mr. Benson did sometimes in hours of sick incapacity for exertion, turn inwards, it was to cry aloud with almost morbid despair, " God be merciful to me, a sinner!" But he strove to leave his life in the hands of God, and to forget himself.' "

Those two years at Newcastle bore fruit in after years, when Mrs. Gaskell had a " Dissenting minister's

household" of her own to manage, and the same peaceful harmony reigned there. All her changes seemed to be just a unique preparation for her future work, and everything appeared to tend towards the sanctified life that she afterwards lived. Elizabeth Stevenson early learnt the great lesson to forget herself and think of others, and Newcastle contributed much to her literary and domestic career.

In *Cranford* there is a reference to Newcastle-on-Tyne, which refers to a visit by Mary, daughter of Dr. Peter Holland, to her uncle's home, which is based on actual facts. Mary Holland, Mrs. Gaskell's cousin, went to visit her aunt and uncle Turner at Newcastle about the time of the expected invasion on the east coast by Napoleon, for in the Mayer MSS. is a letter written by Dr. Peter Holland, under date July 22nd, 1805. Referring to his children, he says: "Mary is with her aunt Turner at Newcastle," and Miss Mary Holland has long been known as the original of Miss Jenkyns in *Cranford*.

Mrs. Gaskell writes: "I can't quite remember the date, but I think it was in 1805 that Miss Jenkyns wrote the longest series of letters—on occasion of her absence in a visit to some friends near Newcastle-on-Tyne. These friends were intimate with the commandant of the garrison there, and heard from him of all the preparations that were being made to repel the invasion of Buonaparte, which some people imagined might take place at the mouth of the Tyne. Miss Jenkyns was evidently very much alarmed; and the first part of her letters was often written in pretty intelligible English, conveying particulars of the preparations which were made in the family with whom she was residing against the dreaded event; the bundles of clothes that were packed up ready for a flight to Alston Moor (a wild, hilly piece of ground

between Northumberland and Cumberland); the signal that was to be given for this flight, and for the simultaneous turning out of the volunteers under arms —which said signal was to consist (if I remember rightly) in ringing the church bells in a particular and ominous manner. One day, when Miss Jenkyns and her host were at a dinner-party at Newcastle, this warning summons was actually given (not a very wise proceeding, if there be any truth in the moral attached to the fable of the Boy and the Wolf; but so it was), and Miss Jenkyns, hardly recovered from the fright, wrote the next day to describe the sound, the breathless shock, the hurry and alarm; and then, taking breath, she added, 'How trivial, my dear father, do all our apprehensions of the last evening appear, at the present moment, to calm and inquiring minds.'"

Newcastle also appears in the story of *Sylvia's Lovers*, being the place where Philip Hepburn started for London, and Molly Corney's mother was said to come from "Newcassel way."

Mr. Turner was living not far from his former pupil's home when *Ruth* was published in 1853. He at once recognised the old house depicted by the novelist in *Ruth*. He was keenly interested in his former pupil and her brave stand against an unmerciful public, which judged poor Ruth much as Mr. Bradshaw did in the novel. This scene is one of Mrs. Gaskell's masterpieces, for, in reading it, the fierce denunciation by Mr. Bradshaw can almost be heard, and the pathetic picture of poor Ruth pleading, "I was so young," compares with Mildred's cry, under similar circumstances, in Browning's *Blot in the 'Scutcheon*: "I was so young, . . . I had no mother, God forgot me, and I fell."

"His face was almost purple with suppressed agitation. . . . Ruth . . . had risen, and stood

trembling, shaking, a lightning-fear having shewn her the precipice on which she stood. It was of no use; no quiet, innocent life—no profound silence, even to her own heart, as to the Past; the old offence could never be drowned in the Deep; but thus, when all was calm on the great, broad, sunny sea, it rose to the surface, and faced her with its unclosed eyes and its ghastly countenance. The blood bubbled up to her brain, and made such a sound there, as of boiling waters, that she did not hear the words that Mr. Bradshaw first spoke; indeed, his speech was broken and disjointed by intense passion. But she needed not to hear; she knew. As she rose up at first, so she stood now—numb and helpless. When her ears heard again (as if the sounds were drawing nearer, and becoming more distinct, from some faint, vague distance of space) Mr. Bradshaw was saying, 'If there be one sin I hate—I utterly loathe—more than all others, it is wantonness. It includes all other sins. It is but of a piece that you should have come with your sickly, hypocritical face imposing upon us all. I trust Mr. Benson did not know of it—for his own sake, I trust not. Before God, if he got you into my house on false pretences, he shall find his charity at other men's expense shall cost him dear—you—the common talk of Eccleston for your profligacy.'—He was absolutely choked by his boiling indignation. Ruth stood speechless, motionless. Her head drooped a little forward; her eyes were more than half-veiled by the large quivering lids; her arms hung down straight and heavy. At last she heaved the weight off her heart enough to say, in a faint, moaning voice, speaking with infinite difficulty, 'I was so young.'"

Mr. Bradshaw's concluding words to his daughter, who stood by Ruth: "'If ever you or any child of mine cared for her, shake her off from you as St.

Paul shook off the viper, even into the fire,'" characterised the hard, unforgiving spirit of the times, when such as Ruth—more sinned against than sinning—found human forgiveness denied, and were glad to end their lives, as Ruth would have done, but for the timely rescue of good Mr. Benson, rather than face a cold, cruel world.

This story caused Mrs. Gaskell much anxiety, and after its publication she was grieved to find that many of her friends, and even some of her relatives, did not see the "beauty of holiness" which hovered over its pages. She had written with a full heart, and had put on record her Christ-like views of what ought to be the treatment meted out to betrayed innocence, but many did not see eye to eye with her. The book was issued when false modesty was common, and "the whited sepulchre" had an easy chance of passing as genuine.

As a minister's wife, Mrs. Gaskell had many opportunities of knowing girls in Manchester who had forfeited their innocence, and had afterwards found the world hard, cold, and condemning. Indeed, those were days when such as Ruth were put among the unpardonables, and their betrayers were not only allowed to go "scot free," but were well received in respectable society.

It is not surprising that Manchester has placed Mrs. Gaskell's marble bust amongst its local worthies in the Victoria University, for her name deserves to rank with the greatest of Victorian women. In striking contrast to the novels of to-day, all her stories had a purpose, and that purpose in *Ruth* was fraught with mercy for the erring. It is not generally known that *Ruth* had much to do in helping Josephine Butler to take her noble stand on the side of the fallen and forsaken. She saw the beauty and the true spirit of

mercy which ran through the brave words of Mrs. Gaskell's novel, and in her fight for the fallen she encountered the same opposition and derision which had given Mrs. Gaskell so much pain for a time. Mrs. Josephine Butler, in her memoirs, refers to the view held by men and women who frequented the drawing-rooms of Oxford, where she was then staying. A moral lapse in a woman was considered to be infinitely worse than in a man. A pure woman, it is said, should be absolutely ignorant of a class of evils, although women were the greater sufferers from those very evils. Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth* had just been published, and the common opinion in a drawing-room, where Mrs. Butler was present, was unfavourable to Mrs. Gaskell's treatment of the subject. One young man declared that he would not allow his mother to read such a book. Mrs. Butler brought a case similar to Ruth's under the notice of one of the most highly esteemed men in the University. She wished him to suggest some means of bringing the man to feel some remorse for the wrong he had done the girl, but he only advocated silence and inaction. "It could only do harm to open up in any way such a question as this." Mrs. Butler strongly opposed this mode of treating such a subject, and concludes by quoting the words of Blake :

> "The harlots' curse from street to street,
> Shall weave old England's winding-sheet."

The criticism of *Ruth* caused Mrs. Gaskell much anxiety. Among the people who were shocked and could not see the purpose of this thrilling story were some of her Knutsford relatives and friends. This grieved her very much, and the anxiety affected her health. Such a book as *Ruth* could not fail to cause expressions of disapproval from some quarters. It was a pity that the novelist should have allowed these

words of censure to trouble her. It is, perhaps, not surprising that her critics were mainly women drawn especially from that class that reads little, and is apt to constitute itself the guardian of public morals. But the novelist got praise as well as censure, and from people who knew how to estimate the goodness of her purpose in writing such a story. Bunsen, Hallam, Kingsley, Dickens, Forster, Cobden, Florence Nightingale, and F. Denison Maurice were among those who wrote encouraging letters to her, and they certainly had a right to represent the public. The widow of Bishop Stanley wrote to say that her own sons considered this to be "one of the most virtue-stirring books they had ever read," and Chevalier Bunsen was especially warm in his admiration of "the courage as much as of the genius of the noble-minded authoress." Lady Stanley of Alderley remarked that "all the men who were worth caring about liked the book."

In *Ruth*, although Dissent was still looked upon as heresy by some, we meet in Thurstan Benson a good type of a Dissenting minister, for Mrs. Gaskell believed that how a man lives is of more importance than what a man believes. Few who have read *Ruth* have failed to see that Mrs. Gaskell's whole soul was revolting at the injustice meted out to such victims as Ruth, and her name is one that will stand by Mrs. Butler's as that of a woman whose sympathy was with the fallen and the oppressed, and who had to suffer for her brave exposure of the wrongs of those who were unable to help themselves.

The closing scene between Mr. Donne and Thurstan Benson in the presence of Ruth, "who lay in the calm beauty of death, with her arms crossed over her breast," is a fitting close for the pathetic story, and few have read it without tears. After Mr. Donne had offered money to bring up Ruth's son, as a poor

compensation for his youthful folly, the novelist graphically depicts the meeting with the good minister, who had sheltered Ruth during her trouble.

"Mr. Benson set his teeth hard together, to keep in words little short of a curse. . . . He did not speak, he could not, till he had gathered some peace from looking at the ineffable repose of the Dead. Then, before he answered, he covered up her face, and in his voice there was a stillness of ice. 'Leonard is not unprovided for. Those that honoured his mother will take care of him. He shall never touch a penny of your money. Every offer of service you have made, I reject in his name and her presence,' said he, bending towards the Dead. 'Men may call such actions as yours youthful follies! There is another name for them with God.'"

Mrs. Gaskell's account of Mr. Benson failing to give the funeral sermon for poor Ruth is given with pathos and reverence. "And now her life was over, her struggle ended.

"Sermon and all was forgotten. He sat down and hid his hands for a minute or so. Then he arose, pale and serene. He put the sermon away and opened the Bible, and read the seventh chapter of Revelations, beginning at the ninth verse. Before it was finished most of his hearers were in tears. It came home to them as more appropriate than any sermon could have been.

"'And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"'Therefore, are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

"'They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

" 'For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.' "

Mr. Turner published three volumes of his discourses, and amongst them are several funeral sermons, preached in memory of his personal friends. Mrs. Gaskell may have heard such a sermon as she described when she worshipped at Hanover Square Chapel, and knowing the influence of Mr. Turner, might well take him as her model for Thurstan Benson. The name Thurstan is a family name of the Hollands, and is still held by more than one of them to-day. In discussing names in *Ruth*, Mrs. Gaskell says : " Thurstan was called by his name because my father wished it, for, although he was what people called a radical and a democrat in his ways of talking and thinking, he was very proud in his heart of being descended from some old Sir Thurstan who figured away in the French wars."

It has been suggested that Frederick Denison Maurice, who in his early days was reared as a Unitarian, and of whom Mrs. Gaskell was a devoted admirer, had much to do with the views expressed by Thurstan Benson on the serious problem with which *Ruth* deals. The Rev. Frederick Denison Maurice mentioned the story of *Ruth* in one of his lectures, speaking of Mrs. Gaskell as " a noble-hearted and pure-minded writer, who had given a story as true to human experience as it is to the divinest morality."

Mrs. Gaskell tells in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* of conversations which she had with Miss Brontë on this subject of the betrayal of young girls, and the two novelists agreed as to the views expressed in *Ruth*.

CHAPTER IX

EDINBURGH

(1831–1832)

ELIZABETH STEVENSON leaves Newcastle-on-Tyne and goes to Edinburgh—Cholera Epidemic at Newcastle—References to this in *Ruth*—Some of Mrs. Gaskell's short Stories based upon her Experience in Edinburgh—Society Life in Edinburgh.

AFTER her two years at Newcastle-on-Tyne, Elizabeth Stevenson went to Edinburgh for the last year before her marriage. The fact that she made her home away from her mother's relatives in Cheshire after her father's death, and chose to go to the districts associated with his memory, seems to indicate that she had a wish to be independent, and this, judging from her father's Scotch character, would doubtless be in accordance with his wish, although Knutsford was always regarded by her as home, and her aunt Lumb always received from her the most filial devotion. In *Ruth* the novelist describes the heroine's first night in her attic bedroom at Eccleston, when, "sleepless, weary, and restless," she went to the long casement window to look on to the far-away hilly line of the horizon. From the house, described as the one in which Elizabeth lived, when visiting the Turners, the hills on the horizon would be the Rothbury hills, beyond which were Berwick-on-Tweed, East Lothian, and, still farther north, Edinburgh, all places associated with her father's memory, which would have a pathetic attraction for the orphan, who had been so recently bereaved.

The immediate reason for Miss Stevenson's change of residence from Newcastle-on-Tyne to Edinburgh

may be partly accounted for by the fact that an epidemic of Asiatic cholera was sweeping over certain parts of Europe during the summer of 1831, and Sunderland and Newcastle-on-Tyne, owing to trade relations with continental ports, became infected in the following autumn. Where possible, families left their homes in Newcastle with all speed, and many parents sent their children to other parts of the country. There was ample reason for this scare, for it is estimated that in Newcastle one in every seventy died with the scourge, in spite of the efforts made by the local authorities. As soon as the cholera appeared in Sunderland, the Newcastle authorities took measures to check the spread to their own locality. The streets were washed with hot lime and thoroughly cleansed, cholera hospitals were opened in each parish, and orders were given that the dead should be interred within twelve hours of their decease. Mr. Turner and other prominent citizens at Newcastle rendered what help they could to those who were responsible for the welfare of the town. The closing chapters of *Ruth*, where the heroine becomes a nurse during an epidemic, may have had its origin in the scourge of 1831. Mrs. Gaskell evidently had this epidemic in her mind when she wrote the chapter in *Ruth* entitled " A mother to be proud of," in which she substituted typhus fever for Asiatic cholera : " Old people tell of certain years when typhus fever swept over the country like a pestilence ; years that bring back the remembrance of deep sorrow—refusing to be comforted—to many a household ; and which those whose beloved passed through the fiery time unscathed, shrink from recalling ; for great and tremendous was the anxiety—miserable the constant watching for evil symptoms ; and, beyond the threshold of home, a dense cloud of depression hung over society at large. . . .

"And, to add to the horror, like all similar pestilences, its course was most rapid at first, and was fatal in the great majority of cases—hopeless from the beginning. There was a cry, and then a deep silence, and then rose the long wail of the survivors. A portion of the infirmary of the town was added to that already set apart for a fever ward; the smitten were carried thither at once whenever it was possible, in order to prevent the spread of infection, and on that lazar-house was concentrated all the medical skill and force of the place."

It has been suggested that Mr. Turner sent his daughter Ann and Miss Stevenson to Edinburgh for safety, and that Edinburgh was chosen partly to gratify Miss Stevenson's wish to see the city, because of its associations with her father's days, when editor of the *Scots Magazine* and "university coach" to the students. She may also have wished to visit the little village of Laughton, where for four years he worked his scientific experiments on a little farm, and possibly, like Farmer Holman, preached on Sundays. Every residence associated with Mrs. Gaskell's life has contributed its share towards her novels, and Edinburgh lives in one of her books known as *Round the Sofa*. This was the title given to six other shorter stories, which were supposed to be told by six different members, on six different evenings, of an informal weekly "at home," held in an Edinburgh drawing-room. This was a device used by the novelist in order to make up a volume of her own short stories, which had previously been published in different magazines, and included *My Lady Ludlow*, which appeared in *Household Words* from June 19th to September 25th, 1858; *An Accursed Race*, in August 25th, 1855; *Half a Lifetime Ago*, in the first three weekly numbers in October; *The Poor Clare*,

in December 13th and 27th of the year 1856; and *The Doom of Griffiths*, which was published in *Harper's Magazine* in the November of that year.

These stories were prefaced with a prologue, which gives a happy picture of the narrators, sitting around the sofa in Margaret Dawson's drawing-room in Edinburgh, and listening to the first story, which is told by the hostess, to be succeeded by each one in turn adding another story, by way of filling up the syllabus for the evenings at home. Mrs. Gaskell has linked them together by a few casual remarks to add to the continuity of the volume. This game of "each of you must tell a story" was with Mrs. Gaskell a favourite mode of entertaining, and these tales were probably first told by her "ain fireside" to her own family circle. The art of story-telling was one of her natural gifts, and those who knew her say it excelled her story-writing for, in listening to her tales, there was the charm of her gracious personality, with its wooing note, kindly humour, and almost eager anxiety. Well might Dickens call her his "Scheherazade."

The introduction to the first story of *Round the Sofa* is largely autobiographical, and the narrator gives her first impressions of her lodgings in the Edinburgh Old Town:

"It was at first rather dreary to give up our merry out-of-doors life, with our country home, for dull lodgings, with only poor, grave Miss Duncan for my companion; and to exchange our romps in the garden and rambles through the fields for stiff walks in the streets, the decorum of which obliged me to tie my bonnet-strings neatly, and put on my shawl with some regard to straightness.

"The evenings were the worst. It was autumn, and, of course, they daily grew longer; they were long enough, I am sure, when we first settled down

in those grey and drab lodgings." This was Elizabeth Stevenson's first experience of living among strangers. She had previously been with relatives in gossipy Knutsford, where everybody knew everybody else's business, and in Newcastle, where, by virtue of the many offices held by the minister, they knew everybody who was worth knowing in the town. The two strangers would be sure to feel the loneliness of city life, "where everybody minds his own business and never meddles with his neighbours," but in after years Mrs. Gaskell looked back on her Edinburgh days with pleasure, counting it one of the privileges of her life to have known in his own capital the canny Scot, with his love of learning, and old-fashioned courtesy mingled with Scotch brusqueness and stolid reserve.

The introduction to *Round the Sofa* was written twenty-eight years after Elizabeth Stevenson lived in Edinburgh, but the first impression was still fresh in her memory, though she looked at the poverty which, in marked contrast to that at Cranford, was not "genteel," nor was the economy "elegant." It appeared to the stranger as hard, and was plainly recognisable as such; but age and experience altered her opinion of what was one of her trials when in Edinburgh:

"Looking back on the household now, there was perhaps much to admire in their quiet endurance of decent poverty; but, at this time, their poverty grated against many of my tastes, for I could not recognise the fact, that in a town the simple graces of fresh flowers, clean white muslin curtains, pretty bright chintzes all cost money, which is saved by the adoption of dust-coloured moreen, and mud-coloured carpets. There was not a penny spent on mere elegance in that room, yet there was everything

considered necessary to comfort, but, after all, such mere pretences of comfort! A hard, slippery, black horse-hair sofa, which was no place of rest; an old piano, serving as a side-board; a grate, narrowed by an inner supplement, till it hardly held a handful of small coal, which could scarcely ever be stirred up into a genial blaze.

"But there were two evils even worse than the coldness and bareness of the rooms:

"One was that we were provided with a latch-key, which allowed us to open the front door whenever we came home from a walk, and go upstairs without meeting any face of welcome, or hearing the sounds of a human voice in the apparently deserted house . . . and the other, which might almost seem to neutralise the first, was the danger we were always exposed to on going out, of the old man—sly, miserly, and intelligent—popping out upon us from his room, close to the left hand of the door, with some civility which we learned to distrust as a mere pretext for extorting more money, yet which it was difficult to refuse." Speaking of the women in this boarding-house, the narrator says: "On them poverty had laid her heavy left hand, instead of her blessing right. Miss Mackenzie kept us as short in our food as she decently could—we paid so much a week for our board, be it observed; and if one day we had less appetite than another, our meals were docked to the smaller standard, until Miss Duncan ventured to remonstrate."

This censure on the entry into Edinburgh lodging-house life is a prelude to the introduction to the society life of Edinburgh, which forms a welcome contrast to what has gone before. The two strangers, after being in Edinburgh for a fortnight, get an informal invitation to an "evening at home," held each Monday at Mrs. Dawson's, which they joyfully accepted. The

narrator says: "If it had been to spend an evening at the dentist's, I believe I should have welcomed the invitation, so weary was I of the monotony of the nights in our lodgings. . . . Hitherto I had never been out to a party of grown-up people; and no court-ball to a London young lady could seem more redolent of honour and pleasure than this Monday evening to me.

"Dressed out in a new stiff book-muslin, made up to my throat—a frock . . . which had then appeared to me a robe too lovely and angelic to be ever worn short of Heaven—I went with Miss Duncan to Mr. Dawson's at the appointed time." Whether the two strangers in humble lodgings did get invited to the actual Monday evenings described, or whether Mrs. Gaskell is post-dating the account of Edinburgh society life, and describing the evenings which her father and her cousin, Sir Henry Holland, were accustomed to attend twenty years before she went to Edinburgh, is not certain. The description of Mrs. Dawson's "at homes" suggests Mrs. Fletcher, whom Mrs. Gaskell knew in later life, as a former friend of her father and of Sir Henry Holland, when they were both connected with Edinburgh University.

Mrs. Fletcher, whom Mrs. Gaskell met in the Lake District in 1849, just after reading *Mary Barton*, says: "It was with infinite pleasure I heard that it was written by the daughter of one whom I both loved and reverenced in my early married life in Edinburgh, so that I had a twofold pleasure in making Mrs. Gaskell's acquaintance"; and in her diary she describes the society evenings of the days of her early married life in Edinburgh: "People did not in these parties meet to eat, but to talk and listen," just as described by Mrs. Gaskell in her introduction to *Round the Sofa*.

"The society of Edinburgh at that time was delightful," says Mrs. Fletcher, naming the principal hostesses, and it is interesting to find that Sir Henry Holland gives the same leaders of society a place in his *Recollections* when writing of the "female side of the society of Edinburgh," while he adds the name of Mrs. Fletcher, at whose house he was a frequent visitor. Mrs. Gaskell and Mrs. Fletcher became great friends during the summer of 1849, and they were evidently attracted to each other, for both were literary, fond of travel, and especially interested in children generally, whilst passionately devoted to their own. It is possible that in the absence of any biographical reminiscence, Mrs. Gaskell has left her tribute of esteem for her old friend in the introduction to *Round the Sofa*, for Dawson was Mrs. Fletcher's maiden name, and, like Mrs. Dawson of the story, was not Scotch, which was apparent from her "broad tongue."

"That dear Mrs. Dawson! The mention of her comes into my mind like the bright sunshine into our dingy little drawing-room came in those days; as a sweet scent of violets greets the sorrowful passer among the woodlands."

The novelist describes Mrs. Dawson, "who must have been sixty, and yet her face looked very soft and smooth and childlike." In 1831, Mrs. Fletcher was sixty-one. The description of the drawing-room fits the one described at Hanbury Court exactly, but the guests are more like those who crowded Mrs. Fletcher's room at the beginning of the nineteenth century. "In came Edinburgh professors, Edinburgh beauties, and celebrities. . . . By each learned man, by each lovely girl, she was treated as a dear friend. With Mrs. Dawson every word was a pearl or a diamond." These *Round the Sofa* stories also owe

something to Mrs. Gaskell's Russian friend, Madame de Circourt, who was for many years an invalid, round whose couch the best of Parisian society gathered.

During this winter in Edinburgh, Elizabeth Stevenson's maidenly beauty was greatly admired, and she was asked by more than one artist to allow a portrait of herself to be drawn. No photograph seems to have been taken about this time, but fortunately her friends prevailed upon her to sit to Dunbar, a well-known sculptor of that time, and a beautiful marble bust of the fair *débutante* was executed with great fidelity. This pleasing souvenir of Miss Stevenson's Edinburgh days is enclosed in a glass case, and stands on a pedestal in the corner of the drawing-room at Plymouth Grove, Manchester, the most priceless ornament in the room. It is hoped that it will ultimately find its way to the National Portrait Gallery, where a bust of Grace Darling, by the same sculptor, is to be seen.

Twenty years after Elizabeth Stevenson left Edinburgh, she and Charlotte Brontë were discussing that romantic city in the old Haworth Vicarage, when Mrs. Gaskell paid her only visit to her friend's home. Mrs. Gaskell says : " In connection with this conversation, she [Charlotte Brontë] mentioned a little abortive plan, which I had not heard of till then ; how in the previous July she had been tempted to join some friends in an excursion to Scotland. They set out joyfully, she with especial gladness, for Scotland was a land which had its roots deep down in her imaginative affections, and the glimpse of two days at Edinburgh was all she had as yet seen of it." It would be pleasant reading to know what Mrs. Gaskell had to say to Charlotte Brontë about the Edinburgh of her youth, but she was most careful not to introduce

herself into the biography of her friend. She was anxious "that every line should go to its great purpose of making her known and valued," and time has shown how well Mrs. Gaskell succeeded. Charlotte Brontë also tells us how she used her brief two days in the northern capital, and also what she thought of Edinburgh, for in a letter to Mr. W. S. Williams, written in 1850, she says:

"Who, indeed, that has once seen Edinburgh, with its couchant crag-lion, but must see it again in dreams, waking or sleeping? My dear sir, do not think I blaspheme, when I tell you that your great London, as compared with Dun-Edin, 'mine own romantic town,' is as prose compared to poetry, or as a great rumbling, rambling, heavy epic compared to a lyric, brief, bright, and vital as a flash of lightning. You have nothing like Scott's monument, or if you had that and all the glories of architecture assembled together, you have nothing like Arthur's Seat; and, above all, you have not the Scotch national character, and it is that grand character after all which gives the land its true charm, its true greatness."

And in another brief letter, this time to Ellen Nussey, she says: "But though the time was brief and the view of objects limited, I found such a charm of situation, association, and circumstance, that I think the enjoyment experienced in that little space equalled in degree, and excelled in kind, all which London yielded during a month's sojourn. Edinburgh, compared to London, is like a vivid page of history compared to a large, dull treatise on political economy; and as to Melrose and Abbotsford, the names possess music and charm!"

Edinburgh was the crown of Elizabeth Stevenson's maidenhood. After her one winter there she returned once more to Knutsford to prepare for her marriage

with the Rev. William Gaskell, of Manchester. In after years, she paid many visits to the Scotch capital; and it is fitting that the last portrait of her was taken whilst reading in a friend's drawing-room in the same city that secured the marble bust of her when on the threshold of womanhood.

CHAPTER X

MARRIAGE

(August 30th, 1832)

MEETING of Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson and the Rev. William Gaskell—Rev. William Gaskell—Marriage Customs at Knutsford—Rejoicings at Knutsford—An Ideal Marriage—Honeymoon in Wales.

ELIZABETH CLEGHORN STEVENSON first met her future husband, the Rev. William Gaskell, junior minister at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester, at the home of his colleague, the Rev. John Gooch Robberds, who had married Mary, elder daughter of the Rev. William Turner, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, with whom Elizabeth Stevenson had resided for two years. When home for her holidays, Elizabeth Stevenson occasionally visited Mr. and Mrs. Robberds, who resided at Greenheys, Manchester, and here Mr. Gaskell was often to be found. The betrothal was said to have been an ideal one; each seemed to be made for the other, and the engagement gave much satisfaction to the relatives and friends of the young couple. The Greenheys Fields, which the novelist describes so faithfully in *Mary Barton*, were associated with the happy days just before her marriage. She refers to this part of Manchester as a pretty, rural district, with black-and-white farm-houses. "Here and there an old black-and-white farm-house, with its rambling outbuildings, speaks of other times and other occupations than those which now absorb the population of the neighbourhood," says Mrs. Gaskell, in writing of a spot dear to her in those days, where "here and

there came a sober, quiet couple, either whispering lovers or husband and wife." The path through these fields leading to what was then the pretty village of Withington was always a favourite walk with Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell, until the builder came and it was changed into a thickly-populated suburb of Manchester.

The engagement between Miss Stevenson and the young minister was not a long one, and the summer of 1832 was a busy time for the prospective bride.

In those days marriages were not solemnised in Dissenting chapels, and so, instead of being married at the quaint Unitarian Chapel, as would have been their wish, they were obliged to have the ceremony in St. John's Parish Church, Knutsford. In the marriage register may be seen the following entry :

" William Gaskell, of the Parish of Manchester, in the county of Lancaster, and Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson, of this Parish, were married in this church by License, this thirtieth day of August in the year 1832 by me, Robert Clowes, Vicar. This marriage was solemnised between us, William Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson, in the presence of Peter Holland Susan Holland, Elizabeth Gaskell, Catherine Holland."

The beautiful bride of that August morning was given away by her uncle, Dr. Peter Holland, who had been as a second father to her. The wedding was very popular in the little country town, and the bride and bridegroom made a singularly handsome couple. William Gaskell was a tall, slender man of twenty-seven, with clear-cut features and an erect, manly bearing ; the young bride was of medium height, with dark brown hair, grey eyes, and beautiful classic features. She was just a month from attaining her twenty-second birthday.

The Rev. William Gaskell, at the time of his marriage with Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson, had been

THE PARISH CHURCH, KNUTSFORD

for four years the junior minister at Cross Street Chapel. He was the son of William Gaskell, a manufacturer of sail-canvas, and was born at Latchford, near Warrington. Educated first at the once famous Warrington Academy, where his father had also been educated along with the sons of Josiah Wedgwood, he afterwards proceeded to Glasgow University, where he took his Master of Arts degree in 1824. He then entered the theological training college for Unitarian ministers at York. Leaving in 1828, he was appointed junior minister at the Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester. About this time, the Unitarian Theological College was transferred from York to Manchester, and became known as the Manchester New College. Mr. Gaskell was made Professor of English History and Literature at the College in 1846, holding this appointment with his Cross Street pastorate. He remained for no fewer than twenty-six years joint minister with Mr. Robberds before he became senior minister. This was his only change, and he sustained the uninterrupted strain of ministering to the same congregation for fifty-six years. He had, as members of his church, many of the most cultured people of Manchester. He also conducted evening classes in Logic and English Literature at the Owen's College, an institution which has done so much for the young students of Manchester, and which is now known as the Victoria University.

Mr. Gaskell's predecessor at Cross Street Chapel, as colleague of the Rev. John Gooch Robberds, was the Rev. Thomas Worthington, once the betrothed of Harriet Martineau.

The old parish church at Knutsford has been enlarged since the days of the Gaskell wedding, and the chancel put farther back, but the spot is pointed out to visitors where the bride and bridegroom stood on

the morning of their wedding. At one end of the church was the family pew, which for generations had belonged to Church House, then the residence of Peter Holland, the Knutsford surgeon. In those days pews were assigned to certain houses, and, although the Hollands were Dissenters, they kept a tenacious hold on the house pew, which in Mrs. Gaskell's early days was rarely used, except by visitors staying at Church House who were not Dissenters. The Holland pew, as it was called, was a big, square one, situated under the gallery. It was lined with baize, having the date on the door in brass nails.

There were great rejoicings in the village on the day of the wedding, and Miss Stevenson's neighbours and friends were proud of the bride, who had spent nearly all her life in their village, and they were glad that she was now only going sixteen miles away to the city of Manchester. Describing the quaint customs of Knutsford, Mrs. Gaskell writes: "One is the custom, on any occasion of rejoicing, of strewing the ground before the houses of those who sympathise in the gladness, with common red sand, and then taking a funnel filled with white sand, and sprinkling a pattern of flowers upon the red ground. This is always done for a wedding, and often accompanied by some verse of rural composition. When I was married, nearly all the houses in the town were sanded, and these were the two favourite verses:

'Long may they live,
Happy may they be,
Blest with content,
And from misfortune free.

'Long may they live,
Happy may they be,
And blest with a numerous
Pro-ge-ny.'"

This proves how popular the Gaskell-Stevenson wedding was, and shows that Miss Stevenson was a great favourite in the town.

In *Sylvia's Lovers*, the last verse is quoted, as being the toast given by Kester when drinking the health of Philip and Sylvia after their marriage. Having recited the verse, Kester says: "Theere, that's po'try for yo' as I larnt i' my youth."

Mrs. Gaskell says: "The tradition about this custom is that there was formerly a well-dressing in the town, and on the annual celebration of this ceremony they strewed the flowers to the house of the latest married bride; by degrees it became a common custom to strew the houses of the bride and her friends, but as flowers were not always to be procured, they adopted this easy substitute. Some people chose to say that it originated in the old church, being too far out of town for the merry sound of bells to be heard on any joyful occasion, so instead of an audible they put a visible sign. But you cannot think how pretty our dear little town looks on such occasions."

"Wedding-cake, wedding-gloves, and wedding-rings are familiar to the whole nation, but wedding-sand belongs pre-eminently to Knutsford alone," wrote the local historian in 1859, when he gave his version of this custom: "The oldest tradition respecting the sanding, which I have been able to gather up, is from a tradesman of the town of the age of seventy-two years, whose grandmother died about sixty years ago, at the age of nearly one hundred. The old lady remembered almost the first introduction of the custom, and her narrative was to the following effect—'The chapel of ease, which stood in the Lower Street, had one small tinkling bell, and that out of repair, probably cracked, so that its tones jarred on the joyous feelings of a wedding morning. The bells of the parochial

the truest sense of the word; he lived a life which shed its radiance on those who were privileged to know him, and he went about doing good." The marble bust of Elizabeth Stevenson, sculptured in Edinburgh only a few months before her marriage, gives an idea of her beauty at this time. She was always spoken of as beautiful, especially in her early womanhood, though her subsequent portraits prove that there is a type of beauty for every age. That her face reflected the beauty of soul within is testified by those who knew her. She had a high sense of duty, and few brides ever started their married life with a loftier ideal of what a minister's wife should be. Perhaps the word *modest* was the one that clung to her oftenest, for all who met her for the first time have always been impressed by this virtue, which she kept throughout her life.

There are some associations that Mrs. Gaskell always regarded as sacred, and one is marriage. In all her works, there is no description of a wedding: the details are left to be filled in. Philip and Sylvia, in *Sylvia's Lovers*, were married, but the readers are not permitted to witness the actual ceremony, and so with Margaret Hale and John Thornton. Their union is assured, though the story closes before the marriage. Had the novelist lived to finish *Wives and Daughters*, the marriage ceremony of Molly Gibson and Roger Hamley would have made a fitting close to the story.

With reference to Charlotte Brontë's wedding, which took place twenty-two years after her own, and in which she took great interest, entering into the feelings of the bride with true sympathy, Mrs. Gaskell says:

"Henceforth the sacred doors of home are closed upon her married life. We, her loving friends, standing outside, caught occasional glimpses of brightness

and pleasant, peaceful murmurs of sound, telling of the gladness within."

Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell returned from their honeymoon to a modest little home at No. 14, Dover Street. The salary of the junior minister at Cross Street Chapel was by no means large, and it was necessary for the young wife to practise that " elegant economy," the art of which she had learnt at her aunt's home in Knutsford. Mrs. Gaskell always dressed very plainly. Unitarian women, like Quakeresses, were somewhat Puritanical in their attire. Nothing extravagant was permitted in many of their homes, and the sombre colours of grey and brown were usual for dresses, varied by one good black silk dress, which had to do duty for Sundays and special occasions. Mrs. Gaskell had no love for jewellery of any kind. Unlike the ladies of Cranford, who wore as many as seven brooches at a time, she was content with one. In later years, her favourite was a small one, containing a lock of her only boy's hair. With regard to this plainness of her attire, Mrs. Lynn Lynton, in a letter to her sister, writes :

" Other notabilities with whom I rubbed shoulders in London were, amongst others, Mrs. Gaskell, with her beautiful white arms bare to the shoulders, and as destitute of bracelets as her hands were of gloves."

CHAPTER XI

MANCHESTER

(1832–1842)

14, *Dover Street*

WELCOME to Manchester—14, Dover Street—Manchester High School for Girls—Mrs. Gaskell Assists her Husband in his Ministerial Work—Cross Street Chapel and Lower Mosley Street Sunday School—Contrast between Manchester and Knutsford—Correspondence with William and Mary Howitt—Birth of First Child—First Literary Effort in Collaboration with her Husband—*Sketches Among the Poor*—Superstitions in Lancashire and Cheshire—Loss of some of Mrs. Gaskell's Letters to Mary Howitt—Literary Tasks—Birth of Margaret Emily Gaskell—Death of Mrs. Lumb—May-Day Festivities in Knutsford—Mr. Gaskell's Lectures to Working Men—The Novelist's Views of the Factory System—Poverty among the Work-people—Lack of Sympathy between Masters and Operatives—Mr. Gaskell's Strenuous Life—*Clopton House*—Visit to the Continent—Removal to Rumford Street.

MR. AND MRS. GASKELL returned from their honeymoon in North Wales towards the end of September, 1832, in time to take possession of their new home at 14, Dover Street, off Oxford Road, Manchester, on Michaelmas Day, which was the bride's twenty-second birthday. This house was the corner one in a row of nine new houses, which were let at a yearly rental of thirty-two pounds. Mr. Gaskell had secured the house in the previous April. They set up housekeeping on a modest scale, consistent with the position of a junior Dissenting minister, whose salary was but small. Dover Street was then in the semi-rural part of Manchester, and it was convenient for Cross Street Chapel, and the Lower Mosley Street Sunday Schools,

as well as being on the side of the town nearest to Cheshire, which was a point in favour of the young wife's many prospective visits to and from Knutsford.

This house in which Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell spent the first ten years of their married life was, with others, demolished, in order to make room for the site of the Manchester High School for Girls, which was founded in 1874, and held in private houses adapted for the purpose; the present building was erected in 1880. The Gaskell family has always taken a great interest in this school, two of the daughters having been members of the committee of management for many years. The efficient service rendered to this institution by the late Miss Julia Gaskell, who died in 1908, was gratefully acknowledged after her death. This part of Manchester is known as the educational side of the city. Owen's College, now the Victoria University, is near by, and just opposite is the Manchester Art School.

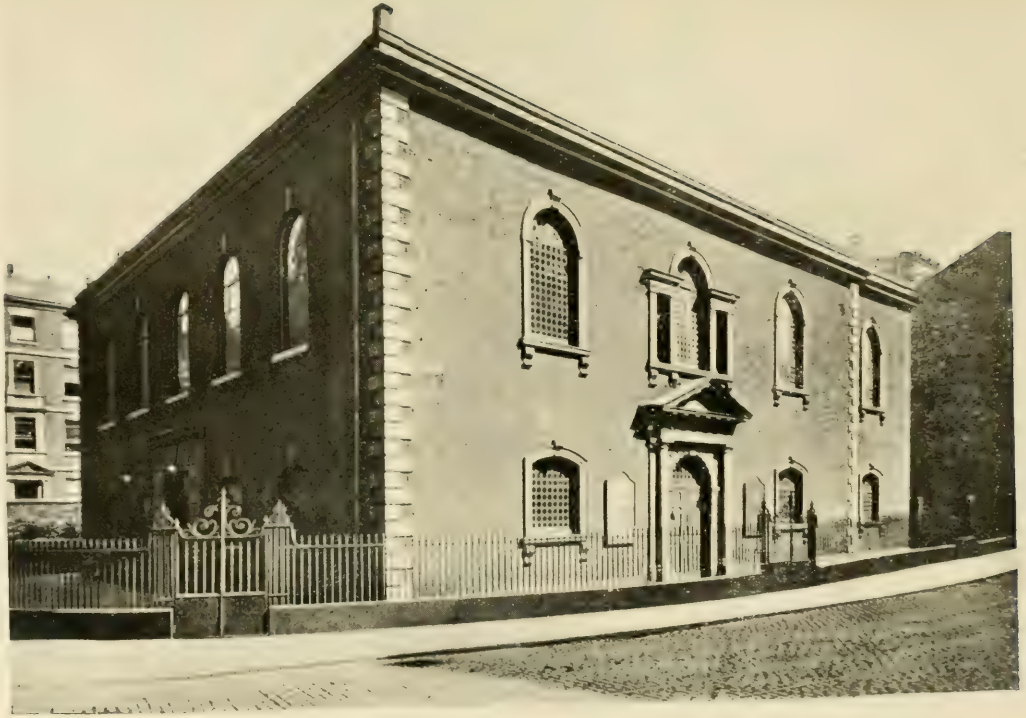
Mrs. Gaskell brought to Manchester the most valuable assets that a minister's wife can possess—wide sympathy, a gracious and genial personality, keen observation, a good memory for names and faces, and strong imaginative powers, together with the "saving grace of humour," which with Lancashire people counts for much. As one who knew her well in those days says: "She had the great faculty of admiring rightly and instinctively. She knew just how to draw out the best side of everybody, making those with whom she conversed feel nobler and better for having been with her."

Mrs. Gaskell threw herself whole-heartedly into her husband's work from the first, and identified herself with the noble aims which he had in view. It was whilst visiting in the homes of her Sunday School scholars, and amongst the poor factory "hands" that

she unconsciously gathered the material for *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell's tastes, aims, and aspirations were identical. In some ways, they were very much like Mr. and Mrs. Browning, except that their lives were more practical. Both were gifted in many ways, and they were especially fond of poetry. Both had a high sense of duty, and quite a genius for finding ways of helping others. They reverenced education, and were glad to impart to others the knowledge they themselves possessed. Both had natural aptitude for teaching, and, above all, they had the supreme gift of winning others and "showing the better way." The readers of Mrs. Gaskell's works owe much to the novelist's husband, for he was ever ready to help and criticise, and from such a source, criticism was always welcomed and valued. Many of the poetical quotations at the beginning of certain chapters in *Mary Barton* were chosen by Mr. Gaskell, and most of the anonymous ones were his own composition.

In the earliest minute book of the Manchester Presbyterian Classes of the period of the Commonwealth, the first two names are Holbrook and Gaskell, with both of whom William Gaskell could claim kindred. The family to which he belonged was related to Nathaniel Gaskell, the maternal grandfather of Lord Clive, who died in 1716. He left the interest on fifty pounds for the poor of Cross Street Chapel and four pounds per annum for teaching poor children to read the Bible.

This old chapel at Cross Street was the first Dissenting place of worship in Manchester, and dates back to the year 1694. On the birthday of the Pretender in the year 1715, the chapel was attacked by a Jacobite mob, and only the walls were left standing. Parliament granted £1,500 as compensation for the



CROSS ST. CHAPEL, MANCHESTER

damage done during the riot. "The chapel was built on what was then known as Plungen's meadow, and the epithet St. Plung'em, which in after years was applied to the building by vulgar people in the bitterness of their hatred to Nonconformity, was a wretched play on the name of Plungen." The church was established as a free church without any distinct creed, though the Unitarian doctrine was first introduced in the year 1742, and the word Presbyterian first appeared in the trust deeds in 1778. The exterior of the building is much as it was when Mrs. Gaskell first entered it as a bride, except that the main entrance is from a side street and not from the busy thoroughfare in front. The interior has been renovated and reseated, so that the actual pew in front of the pulpit in which Mrs. Gaskell formerly sat is not to be seen, though the Gaskell family pew is still used by one of her two surviving daughters. There are now two marble memorial tablets to Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell on the wall to the right of the pulpit, placed there by the congregation "in affectionate remembrance" of their most popular minister and his wife.

The chapel was built in what was then a rural part of the city. Now it stands blackened by the smoke of Manchester, within a stone's-throw of the Royal Exchange and amidst the roar of the traffic of one of the busiest streets. Its green, diamond-shaped windows tell of earlier days, and the graveyard which surrounds it contains the remains of many worthy citizens of the last three centuries. The interior of the chapel is somewhat gloomy, the building being surrounded by high warehouses and business premises. On week days the "dim religious light" contrasts strongly with the hurry and bustle of the busy streets outside. The building is characteristic of the old Dissenting chapels of the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries—plain and substantial. The one ornamental feature is the handsome pulpit, which is of finely polished oak, with a carved beading of a darker wood, the heavy oak door to the upper part of the pulpit being of great thickness. It is remarkable for its general design, for its carving, and the mosaic work on its panels, radiating from a common centre in imitation of streams of light. This fine specimen of a double-decker has a curious history. Tradition says: "It was made for a neighbouring place of worship, and was intended as a gift from a wealthy parishioner; but before the building was completed, the intending donor lost sympathy with the 'cause,' and transferred her gift to the Unitarians."

A large leather Bible, which is always kept in the pulpit—though it is not now used—was the gift of a family connection of the Gaskells, an aunt of Lord Clive's, by whom it was bequeathed to Cross Street Chapel in 1792. This old Bible, dated 1717, is one of the rare copies of what is known as the "Vinegar Bible"—the word vinegar being printed instead of vineyard in the parables. Chained to one of the pews in the old parish church at Chelsea, where, as a girl, Mrs. Gaskell sometimes worshipped, is another copy of the Vinegar Bible.

In a cupboard in the oak panelled vestry at Cross Street is to be seen a simple china christening bowl, which has done duty as a font for baptisms since the chapel was built. It was used for the baptisms of several of Mrs. Gaskell's children. The aisles of the church are paved with the gravestones of many old Presbyterians. On one, dated 1699, is carved the skeleton of a hand holding an hour-glass.

In Mr. Gaskell's early ministry there were often as many as thirty private carriages waiting for members of his congregation. In *Memorials of Two Sisters,*

Miss Susannah Winkworth, although attached to the Church of England, bears testimony to the intellectual influence of the Cross Street Chapel in Mr. Gaskell's early ministerial days. "The Unitarians in Manchester were, as a body, far superior to any other in intellect, culture, and refinement, and certainly did not come behind any other in active philanthropy and earnest efforts for the social improvement of those around them." Several of the old families still attend the chapel, but the tendency has been for the wealthy classes to move away from the city, and the congregation is now very small, and consists mainly of those who travel a long distance in order to continue their association with a place of worship whose history is linked with their own.

There are now no Sunday Schools attached to this old chapel, but formerly a Sunday School was held in what is now the old chapel library, in which are many rare theological books. The larger schoolroom was for fifty years the home of the Manchester Literary Society; amongst its members were Richard Cobden and Jacob Bright. The old Mosley Street Sunday Schools in which Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell taught have been demolished, and new premises have been built a short distance away. Mrs. Gaskell's daughters have maintained the family interest in the Sunday Schools, having been teachers for many years.

Mrs. Gaskell at once identified herself with her husband's work, and helped both in visiting the members of his congregation and the Sunday School scholars, though it is said that from the very first she expressed her conviction that no congregation should expect to control the time of the minister's wife, and that whatever time she gave to her husband's work she gave of her own free will, and not because she felt compelled to do so. Wherever she could help,

she was always willing and ready to go, and there are many testimonies to her charitable work. The regular pastoral visiting she left to her husband.

The young wife found the first year in Manchester a great contrast to Knutsford, which in those days was a very aristocratic place compared with Manchester, having its own customs, as rigid in their propriety as the society of Bath or Leamington. Napoleon once attended the county ball there, and William Pitt visited among the county families, whilst Charles X of France was a visitor there before he became king, and the Duchess of Kent and the late Queen Victoria honoured the George Inn by a visit and permitted the proprietor to use the prefix "Royal." Hence the condescension of the Cranford ladies towards trade and trades-people. Compared with the "genteel poverty" and "sweet content" at Knutsford, Manchester, with its abject privation and deep dissatisfaction among the working classes, was, though less than twenty miles away, a very different place.

Margaret Hale is said to be a true prototype of Mrs. Gaskell as she was when she first came to Manchester. "If the look on her face was too dignified and reserved for one so young, it was bright as the morning, full of dimples and glances, that spoke of childish gladness and boundless hope in the future."

Manchester manners were somewhat embarrassing to this pretty young wife of twenty-two, and the account of the Manchester folks' admiration may be traced in the description of Margaret in *North and South*.

"One day, after she had passed a number of men, several of whom had paid her the not unusual compliment of wishing she was their sweetheart, one of the lingerers added, 'Your bonny face, my lass, makes the day look brighter.' And another day, as she was

unconsciously smiling at some passing thought, she was addressed by a poorly-dressed, middle-aged workman, with 'You may well smile, my lass; many a one would smile to have such a bonny face.'"

It was from 14, Dover Street that Mrs. Gaskell began her interesting correspondence as a stranger with William and Mary Howitt, her first literary friends. In those busy days she had little leisure, but she often had visions of what it would be to be an acknowledged author, for, unasked, she wrote to the Howitts, after reading the commencement of William Howitt's descriptive *Visits to Remarkable Places*, thanking them for the great pleasure two of their books had given her "by their charming description of natural scenery and the thoughts and feelings arising from the happy circumstance of rural life." In her letter she expresses her strong desire, especially in the spring-time, "to be off to the deep grassy solitudes of the country," and compares herself to a bird that resorts in spring-time to its former haunts, which during the colder weather had been forgotten.

Mrs. Gaskell became a mother in the summer of 1833, but the child was still-born, which was a great grief to the parents. Three years afterwards, she visited the little grave, and composed some beautiful lines *On visiting the grave of my still-born little girl.* On September 12th, 1834, another little daughter, Marianne, who is still living, was born. She was taken on November 26th of the same year to Knutsford to be christened at Brook Street Chapel by the Rev. Henry Green, M.A. The duties of wife and mother now filled up Mrs. Gaskell's time, and her happiest days were when her children were young. She was always devoted to little children, and at this time she lived a quiet, uneventful life.

In these early days of their married life, it is evident

that Mrs. Gaskell and her husband cherished the idea of becoming writers, for, in January, 1837, they published in *Blackwood's Magazine* a poem entitled *Sketches Among the Poor* (No. 1), but no second poem, written in collaboration by the young minister and his wife, has ever been published.

Referring to this poem later, Mrs. Gaskell writes:

"We once thought of *trying* to write sketches among the poor, *rather* in the manner of Crabbe (now don't think this presumptuous), but in a more seeing-beauty spirit; and one—the only one—was published in *Blackwood*, January, 1837. But I suppose we spoke our plan near a dog-rose, for it never went any further." This is a reference to a superstition which she had, connecting ill-luck with the dog-rose: "The dog-rose, that pretty libertine of the hedges, with its floating sprays wooing the summer air, its delicate hue and its faint perfume, is unlucky. Never form any plan while sitting near one, for it will never answer."

Although most practical and endowed with much common sense, Mrs. Gaskell was always superstitious, and believed in signs and wonders.

"There are many superstitions kept up about Cheshire and Lancashire," she says. "The servant-maids wear a bag containing a druggist's powder called dragon's blood upon their heart, which will make them beloved by the person they love. A pretty servant once told me, 'It always had the desired effect with her.' They make a curtsey to the new moon when first they see it, and turn the money in their pockets, which *ought* to be doubled before the moon is out.

"Many poetical beliefs are vanishing with the passing generation. A shooting star is unlucky to see. I have so far a belief in this, that I always have a chill in my heart when I see one, for I have often

noticed them when watching over a sick-bed and very, very anxious."

She also refers to the foxglove :

" I was once saying to an old, blind countrywoman how much I admired the foxglove. She looked mysteriously solemn as she told me they were not like other flowers ; they had ' knowledge ' in them ! Of course, I inquired more particularly, and then she told me that the foxglove knows when a spirit passes by, and always bows the head. Is not this poetical ? and of the regal foxglove with its tapering crimson bells ! I have respected the flower ever since."

Mrs. Gaskell uses this in *Ruth*, where Mr. Benson says to Ruth : " ' I dare say, you don't know what makes this foxglove bend and sway so gracefully. You think it is blown by the wind, don't you ? ' ' I always thought it was the wind. What is it ? ' asked Ruth, innocently. ' Oh ! the Welsh tell you that this flower is sacred to the fairies, and that it has the power of recognising them, and all spiritual beings who pass by, and that it bows in deference to them as they waft along. Its Welsh name is Maneg Ellyllyn—the good people's glove ; and hence, I imagine, our folk's glove or fox-glove.' "

The novelist's letters to Mary Howitt at this time are characteristic as showing her love of correspondence. Few busy housewives would have taken the trouble to write to unknown authors or to direct their attention to other places of interest which might prove worth recording in their books.

The fate of some of these letters was deplorable. Narrating the dishonesty of a page-boy of her mother's, Margaret Howitt says : " He surreptitiously disposed of piles of letters belonging to my mother which had been deposited in an old chest, selling them as waste-paper to a cheesemonger. The tradesman freely used

the manuscripts to wrap up his Dorset butter and double Glos'ter, until, perceiving the signature of Charles Dickens or some other well-known autograph, he very honestly restored the residue to the lady to whom they were addressed. Amongst the salvage from this literary wreck, we have valuable communications from Mary Russel Mitford and Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell."

Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were both admirers of Crabbe's homely poetry, and living among the poor of Manchester they saw the unwritten tragedies around them, which inspired them to attempt to write in the same style. The heroine in the *Sketches Among the Poor* is to be found in *Mary Barton* as Alice Wilson, a character which appealed to Mrs. Gaskell, as she knew the delight of country life as compared with smoky Manchester.

Few writers have had the truly poetic spirit in so large a measure as Mrs. Gaskell. She always loved poetry, and was familiar with Goldsmith, Cowper, Crabbe, Hood, Tennyson, Wordsworth, Scott, and Shakespeare, and the fact that her first flight into literature was a poem written in collaboration with her husband suggests a hope of doing more work in this medium ; but it would not have been sentimental verse, but poetry revealing the lot of the poor among whom she visited.

In February, 1837, another daughter, Margaret Emily, was born. It was in this year that Mrs. Gaskell's aunt, Mrs. Lumb, died at Knutsford on May 1st, aged sixty-nine. This was a great grief to her adopted daughter, for Mrs. Lumb had taken the place of her mother and brought her up well and wisely.

The 1st of May is a festival day in Knutsford, and no place in England takes more interest in celebrating the crowning of the May Queen than that old-fashioned

country town. But it had its sad memories for Mrs. Gaskell. She ever cherished a warm affection for her aunt, who had found much comfort after her own sad experience of married life in bringing up her little niece, to whom she was devoted.

Mrs. Gaskell often regretted that her literary fame had not come to her in her aunt's days, for, although she received much appreciation from many great people, none would have been so gratifying as from her good, kind "mother" at Knutsford, to whom she always acknowledged her indebtedness. The last of her maiden aunts, Miss Abigail Holland, died in the same year that *Mary Barton* was published. She had much to do in rearing the future novelist, and, doubtless, she was the prototype of one of the characters in *Cranford*.

Mrs. Lumb left the bulk of her money to her sister, Abigail Holland; but she was to pay Mrs. Gaskell £80 per annum, in quarterly instalments, so long as she—Abigail Holland—lived, which was until July, 1848. Then Mrs. Gaskell received half the amount left by Mrs. Lumb, which increased her income very substantially. This private income was very helpful, as Mr. Gaskell was still only an assistant minister at Cross Street Chapel.

During these quiet, uneventful years of domestic happiness, Mrs. Gaskell may have written some of the sketches which she finished later. *Lizzie Leigh* is said to have been written before *Mary Barton*, although published some time afterwards.

In 1838 Mr. Gaskell had prepared a series of lectures on "The Poets and Poetry of Humble Life," which were very popular in Manchester and the neighbouring towns. In the preparation he was aided by his wife, who helped him, for she writes of trying to "pick up" all the poets who had written on humble life. All this

looking into the " poetry of humble life " helped Mrs. Gaskell to find her characters for *Mary Barton*. The lives of these characters the novelist speaks of as " magic poems, which cannot take formal language." As in the case of the Brontë sisters, Mrs. Gaskell's first attempt at writing found expression in verse ; it was her poetical nature that caused her to see the heights and depths of the lives around her, and which helped her in her inspired moments to write such prose idylls as *Cranford* and *Cousin Phillis*.

Mrs. Gaskell took great interest in her husband's efforts to cultivate a literary taste among the artisans, amongst whom their life's work was cast. Writing to a friend, she mentions how popular Mr. Gaskell's lectures on " The Poets and Poetry of Humble Life " were even amongst the poorest of the weavers in one of the most poverty-stricken districts of Manchester, Miles Platting. She also mentions that Mr. Gaskell had been requested by two deputations of working men to repeat the lectures in other parts of the " Cottonopolis," and that he was preparing another series on the same lines. Mrs. Gaskell always claimed a greater appreciation for " the beauty of many of the common things and daily events of life in its humblest aspects." The poets Crabbe and Hood were frequently consulted, as well as a Lancashire poet, Samuel Bamford, one of whose poems found a place in *Mary Barton*. In one of her letters she concludes with a quotation from *The Old Cumberland Beggar :*

> " Man is dear to man ; the poorest poor
> Long for some moments in a weary life
> When they can know to feel that they have been,
> Themselves, the fathers and the dealers out
> Of some small blessings ; have been kind to such
> As needed kindness, for this simple cause,
> That we have all of us a human heart."

Mrs. Gaskell had very delicate health during her early married life, yet it is recorded that she frequently went in the evening, after a busy day, for a walk of two or three miles to take help and comfort to poor members of their Unitarian Church who were ill. She was an expert in the art of sick visiting, and could cheer and comfort by her very presence. Margaret Hale's account of visiting poor Bessie Higgins is one of many pictures from life taken from the novelist's experience when witnessing the pathetic struggle with the hard times in the "hungry forties." She knew many homes where poverty was endured in a way that made her heart ache, because she could not do more to lighten the burden, and she often puzzled over the problem of the attitude of the masters to their workpeople.

Few could surpass her in appreciation of others, and jealousy had no part in her nature. Her sympathy was more than pity, as she showed in her books. She was able to be at one with those whom she knew, seeing with their eyes and understanding with their spirit—to use an Americanism, she had the power of "being the other man" when judging the deeds of others. It was this clear-sighted intuition which made her books so true to life. She looked outwards for the characters she described in *Mary Barton,* she knew them in real life, and had witnessed their trials and triumphs. In writing to a young author whom she wished to help, Mrs. Gaskell said: "You do not make the reader see the things with your eyes, but you present the scene itself to him." Mrs. Gaskell not only presented the scene, but endeavoured to make the readers see it with her eyes.

Outside her own home life, which she always tried to keep bright and cheerful, were dark clouds caused

by the awful poverty, which she saw around her. Lancashire suffered terribly during this time. The poor were dying for want of food, and such food as some of them got was only fit for pigs. Wheat was at sixty-five to eighty shillings per quarter. It was a common thing for the poor to beg the potato peelings for their own meals. The Lancashire operatives were driven to despair, and strikes were frequent; there was a seething discontent among the working classes. "The state of society in England," wrote Dr. Arnold to Carlyle in 1840, "was never yet paralleled in history." The country was weighed down with a heavy legacy of debt and distress from the great Continental war. Commerce was hampered by the most complex tariff. Rose, in his *Rise of Democracy*, says: "It imposed duties upon 1,200 articles—a system which was disastrous to the nation's finance and to the manufacturers and operatives, who formed the backbone of the nation. Manufacturers had enormous stocks of unsaleable goods; operatives had the bitter experience of an empty larder."

"In Manchester, about the year 1840," says Lord Rosebery (speaking at the centenary of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce in November, 1897), "there were no less than one hundred and eighteen mills and other works standing idle, six hundred and eighty-one shops and offices were untenanted, and five thousand, four hundred and ninety dwellings were unoccupied. In one district, there were two thousand families without a bed among them, and there were eight thousand persons whose weekly income only averaged one-and-twopence-halfpenny.

"In Stockport, a few miles away, seventy-three thousand, three hundred and fourteen persons had received relief, their weekly income not amounting to more than ninepence-halfpenny per head. A grim

humourist chalked up on a window shutter in this town, 'Stockport to let.'"

To Mrs. Gaskell the saddest feature of all this was the unsympathetic attitude of the masters to the workpeople. Referring to the artisans, the novelist says: "Though you think their animosity unjustifiable, put yourselves in their places, and you will see that it is intelligible. Judge what they do, and think not from your own but from their standpoint. Let them tell you how they feel things." Job Leigh, in *Mary Barton*, says: "'I never see the masters getting thin and haggard for want of food in bad times. It's in things for show they cut short, while for such as me, it's in things for life we have to stint.'" 'But,'" continues Mrs. Gaskell through the words attributed to Job Leigh, "'it's no business of mine, thank God. You have it on your own conscience to answer to God whether you've done and are doing all in your power to lighten the evils that seem always to hang on the trades by which you make your fortunes. But I am clear about this—when God gives a blessing to be enjoyed, he gives it with a duty to be done, and the duty of the happy is to help the suffering to bear their woe.'"

In Lancashire the word "hands" is very commonly used for workpeople or employees, and this word grated on the novelist's sensitive ear as being degrading and allied to the word "slave."

Margaret Hale, in her argument with Mr. Thornton about the treatment of his workpeople, gets for reply in *North and South*:

"'My theory is, that my interests are identical with those of my workpeople and *vice versâ*. Miss Hale, I know, does not like to hear men called "hands," so I won't use that word, though it comes most readily to my lips, as the technical term, whose

origin whatever it was, dates from before my time.'"

The spirit of what seems to be antagonism between the masters and the employees caused Mrs. Gaskell many an anxious moment.

"'I get puzzled with living here amongst this strange society.'

"'You think it strange. Why?'

"'I don't know—I suppose, because on the very face of it, I see two classes, dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as opposed to their own. I never lived in a place before where there were two sets of people always running each other down.'"

Manchester life was a problem with its keen competition to this young wife, and yet she saw some beauty even underlying the hard-sweated industries, and she could appreciate the best side of the employers.

"Faith," she says, "such as the rich can never imagine on earth, and love strong as death, knowledge also and energy in overcoming immense difficulties flourished in higher walks of life, together with an honest desire for justice and the public weal."

How well she put the case for the masters as well as the men in *North and South*. Some have said that she wrote this book to counterbalance her first work, *Mary Barton*, which was in favour of the workpeople and against the masters. But the fact was that she had gained in experience since writing *Mary Barton*. Up till then, the sordid life of the poor only had appealed to her, and she longed to help them. Later, she found that there was another side to the question, and that there were some masters who strove to do right and were anxious to be just. Hence the splendid character of John Thornton. Mrs. Gaskell once said: "Of all my novels, *North and South* is the one

I like best, though I feel sure if my name is ever to be immortalised, it will be through *Cranford*, for so many people have spoken to me about it."

Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell worked together hand in hand to ameliorate the lot of those around them, and the history of one bears on the work of the other. Mr. Gaskell tried to do for Manchester what Mr. Turner had done for Newcastle-on-Tyne, the former lecturing on literature and logic, whilst the latter's lectures were mostly scientific and philosophical; but both men were a great help to the people of their respective neighbourhoods. Mr. Gaskell's mission was to teach with his voice rather than with his pen, and his message was to a limited number, to his native county rather than to the world at large. Of Mr. Gaskell it is said: "He was one of those ministers whose congregations were outside as well as inside the chapel walls," and his ministrations were not confined to Manchester, for he was often in request in other parts of Lancashire, and elsewhere.

The young minister at Cross Street was well known for his social work amongst young men and women. One of his old students says: "Mr. Gaskell showed a marked preference for a fine word, and I remember how he used to gloat over Gray's use of *redolent*, and how similar words had a great fascination for him. He was a beautiful reader, and it is recorded that he would lick his intellectual lips over a dainty reading from his favourite authors."

He was at his best in reading Milton, Herrick, Gray, and Pope. He loved nature and the country, but was more at home in the city where he had to deal with human beings—hence the fact that, often when Mrs. Gaskell was away in the country with her children, Mr. Gaskell was at home busy with his work. He took comparatively few holidays, being a man who

found his highest pleasure and even his recreation in his work of preaching, teaching, and visiting the members of his congregation. Mr. Adams, another of his former pupils, says: "There was a Working Men's College in Manchester. The classes I attended were conducted, the one by a Unitarian minister, the other by a curate of the Church of England. The Unitarian minister was the Rev. William Gaskell, husband of the famous novelist. Mr. Gaskell was a master of literature. I thought at the time, that he was the most beautiful reader I had ever heard. Prose or poetry seemed to acquire more lustre and elegance when he read it. Our literary evenings under Mr. Gaskell were ambrosial evenings indeed." Mrs. Gaskell never wrote anything without her husband's approval and sanction. This "master of literature" was her ablest critic and wisest counsellor, and it was because her writings for *Household Words* had just passed Mr. Gaskell's kind but critical inspection before they were sent out, that she wrote firmly to Dickens objecting to "the purple patches with which he was anxious to embroider her work." Dickens rather ridiculed this fastidiousness in a letter to Wilkie Collins, but what was good enough to pass her husband's scrutiny was good enough for the public, and Mrs. Gaskell never sought or needed any other censor.

In 1838, Mrs. Gaskell wrote her short paper on *A Visit to Clopton House*, and sent it to Mr. Howitt, who included it in the account of his own visits to Stratford-on-Avon in *Visits to Remarkable Places*, which was published in 1840. As previously mentioned, this was Mrs. Gaskell's first separate contribution to literature. Mr. and Mrs. Howitt claimed a kind of sponsorship with regard to Mrs. Gaskell's literary work, and it is said that "they urged her to

use her pen for the public benefit." Whether after this short article she wrote anything before 1844, when she commenced *Mary Barton*, is not definitely known. In 1841, Mrs. Gaskell paid her first visit to the Continent with her husband, and it was then that she first met Mr. and Mrs. Howitt, who for some years after were her intimate friends and literary advisers. On this occasion they all took a tour up the Rhine together. Mrs. Gaskell has given reminiscences of these tours on the Continent in one or two of her short stories, *Six Weeks at Heppenheim* and *The Grey Woman*.

Mrs. Gaskell was now a woman of thirty-one, always busy with her home duties and the education of her little daughters, the eldest of whom was now a girl of eight. Both Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell took great interest in their daughters' education, and in the early days they gave them a thorough grounding, so that when they were sent to school they were well prepared for more advanced studies.

CHAPTER XII

MANCHESTER

(1842–1849)

121, *Upper Rumford Street*

121, Rumford Street—Influence of Manchester on the Novelist's Work—*North and South*—The Original of John Thornton—Mrs. Gaskell's Incessant Work—Death of her Son—Relief in Literary Effort—Its Fascination—*Mary Barton*—The "Hungry Forties"—Greenheys Fields and Pepperhill Farm—Difficulties with Publishers—Reception of *Mary Barton*—The Book Criticised—Word Pictures—Industrial Life in Manchester—Three Stories in *Howitt's Journal*—*Libbie Marsh's Three Eras*, *The Sexton's Hero* and *Christmas Storms and Sunshine*—Invitation from Charles Dickens to Celebrate Publication of *David Copperfield*—Mrs. Gaskell Meets other Literary Celebrities.

In 1842, the Gaskells more than doubled their rent by removing to 121, Upper Rumford Street. No. 14, Dover Street, whither Mr. Gaskell brought his bride in 1832, was no longer sufficiently large for the growing family, for there were now three daughters, the eldest a bright, happy girl of eight. The busy wife and mother, who had been accustomed in her younger days to large rooms and a big, rambling garden, with the glorious heath stretching for miles in front of the house, felt the cramping inconvenience of the small rooms at Dover Street, and she was now glad to get more accommodation for herself and family, though she often had a lingering regret that it was not more "countrified." Happy as she was, helping her husband in this corner of "Cottonopolis," she often pined, more for her children's sake than for her own, for the

" dear little town " of her childhood days. She refers somewhere to the absence of spring flowers from the clayey soil of Manchester, and the pleasure which her children derive when first they find the little celandine ; but she also mentions the other blossoms which were found to grow in that black atmosphere, and in the chill soil of penury, such as faith and love.

Apart from the smoky atmosphere and heavy soil, Mrs. Gaskell saw virtues in those suffering Manchester poor, which brought compensation, and made her glad and thankful to be able to help to alleviate the poverty which pressed so heavily on her poorer neighbours.

Manchester revealed to Mrs. Gaskell the serious and strenuous side of life. Knutsford and Stratford-on-Avon, with their quiet, even flow of life, had sown the seed of a well-balanced mind. There she was able to think, meditate and develop as naturally as a flower, but it was Manchester that brought out her splendid capabilities of tact, organisation, and power of managing. The very atmosphere was a great contrast to the clean little town of Knutsford. The high factory chimneys, belching forth huge volumes of dense smoke, which polluted the air and necessitated the good wife changing her curtains very frequently, caused the novelist to write :

" I know it is impossible to keep the muslin blinds clean here above a week together, and at Helstone we have had them up for a month or more, and they have not looked dirty at the end of that time." Mrs. Gaskell evidently means muslin curtains, as blinds were made of stronger material, generally white or grey calico manufactured in Manchester.

In *North and South* Mrs. Gaskell tells of her change to Manchester life. The Milton spoken of is Manchester, though the South, which is mentioned, does not always refer to Hampshire. It may be to

Chelsea, Stratford-on-Avon, or any place south of Manchester, in which Mrs. Gaskell had previously lived. In Nicholas Higgins those who know Lancashire will recognise many local characteristics, and he is founded on Mrs. Gaskell's own experience when visiting among the poor. Without any intention of rudeness, Lancashire operatives take it for granted that they may ask "where you hail from." The picture of Margaret Hale offering poor Bessie Higgins the flowers, brings out this enquiring note from Bessie's father, "'Yo're not of this country I reckon?'" "'No!' said Margaret, half sighing, 'I come from the South—from Hampshire,'" she continued, a little afraid of wounding his consciousness of ignorance, if she used a name which he did not understand.

"'That's beyond London, I reckon? And I come fro' Burnley ways and forty miles to th' North. And yet, yo' see, North and South has both met and made kind of friends in this big, smoky place.'"

This last sentence was the deciding point of the title of the story, for when Charles Dickens was reading through the proofs, Mrs. Gaskell had fixed on the name of her heroine—Margaret Hale—as the title, but Dickens, who liked to act as censor, preferred *North and South;* and as the book was first written as a serial for his own magazine, *Household Words*, that was the title finally decided upon.

Mrs. Gaskell sustains this argument about North *versus* South, where John Thornton, who figures as the self-made Manchester man, after explaining to Mr. Hale the magnificent power, yet delicate adjustment of the might of the steam-hammer, replies to Margaret:

"'I won't deny that I am proud of belonging to a town—or, perhaps, I should rather say a district—the

necessities of which give birth to such grandeur of conception. I would rather be a man toiling, suffering—nay, failing and successless—here, than lead a dull, prosperous life in the old worn grooves of what you call more aristocratic society down in the South, with their slow days of careless ease. One may be clogged with honey and unable to rise and fly.'

"'You are mistaken,' said Margaret, roused by the aspersion on her beloved South to a fond vehemence of defence, that brought the colour into her cheeks and the angry tears into her eyes. 'You do not know anything about the South. If there is less adventure or less progress—I suppose I must not say less excitement—from the gambling spirit of trade, which seems requisite to force out these wonderful inventions, there is less suffering also. I see men here going about the streets who look ground down by some pinching sorrow or care—who are not only sufferers but haters. Now, in the South we have our poor, but there is not that terrible expression in their countenances of a sullen sense of injustice which I see here.'"

This mention of the inventor of the steam-hammer, which also occurs in *Cousin Phillis*, refers to James Nasmyth, the distinguished engineer and inventor of several mechanical appliances, who was the son of Alexander Nasmyth, a well-known Scotch artist. After receiving his early education at the Edinburgh High School, where he learnt "small Latin and less Greek," he turned his talents to engineering, and became later an assistant in Maudslay's engineering works in London, where he lived on ten shillings a week—five for food, the remainder for rent and clothing. In 1834 (two years after Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell set up housekeeping), Mr. Nasmyth came to Manchester as a young working mechanical engineer of twenty-six. In 1836 he had so far succeeded as to

be able to build the large Bridgewater Foundry at Patricroft, a suburb of Manchester. It was in 1839 that he invented the steam-hammer, and in 1840 he married and came to live close by his works at an old-fashioned house known as "Fireside," in the garden of which was a large mounted telescope. The story of the ghost which haunted this garden belongs to a past generation. Afterwards the ghost was known to be Mr. Nasmyth in his nightshirt, viewing the heavens through his telescope, every part of which he had made himself.

Among James Nasmyth's early Manchester friends were the three brothers Grant, who served Charles Dickens as the originals of the brothers Cheeryble. They had a factory at Ramsbottom, near Manchester. Mr. Nasmyth was a genius in more ways than one. When looking for a model employer of labour to counteract the impression given in *Mary Barton* of the hard-hearted, unfair masters, Mrs. Gaskell was fortunate in finding Mr. Nasmyth, who not only paid good wages to his workpeople, but also took an interest in housing their families, and was prepared to take his own share in the practical work. The conversation between John Thornton and Margaret's father in *North and South* was probably suggested by friendly chats which took place between Mr. Nasmyth and Mr. Gaskell, and Margaret's trite expressions are known to be the opinions of Mrs. Gaskell, when first she went to live in Manchester, for, like Margaret, she was young and impulsive, and inclined to disparage Manchester as compared with the other places in which she had lived. Mr. and Mrs. Nasmyth were welcome guests at the Gaskells' home, and Mrs. Gaskell was fond of taking people to see the interesting works at Patricroft, for one of Mr. Gaskell's relatives became a partner in the firm.

In *North and South* Mrs. Gaskell describes Mr. Hale, the retired parson, and John Thornton very minutely. This gives the clue to the originals, who for the time being were Mr. Gaskell and Mr. Nasmyth.

" Her father was a slight figure, which made him appear taller than he really was when not contrasted, as at this time, with the tall, massive frame of another. The lines in her father's face were soft and waving, with a frequent, undulating kind of trembling movement passing over them, showing every fluctuating emotion ; the eyelids were large and arched, giving to the eyes a peculiar languid beauty which was almost feminine. The brows were finely arched, but were, by the very size of the dreamy lids, raised to a considerable distance from the eyes. Now, in Mr. Thornton's face, the straight brows fell low over the clear, deep-set, earnest eyes, which, without being unpleasantly sharp, seemed intent enough to penetrate into the very heart and core of what he was looking at. The lines in the face were few but firm, as if they were carved in marble, and lay principally about the lips, which were slightly compressed over a set of teeth so faultless and beautiful as to give the effect of sudden sunlight, when the rare, bright smile, coming in an instant and shining out of the eyes, changed the whole look from the severe and resolved expression of a man ready to do and dare everything, to the keen honest enjoyment of the moment, which is seldom shown so fearlessly and instantaneously except by children."

Such a character as that of Mr. Nasmyth could not fail to attract the novelist, and John Thornton certainly redeems the reputation of the Manchester manufacturers, though the original was a Scotsman, like the Cheeryble brothers, and not a native of Manchester as John Thornton is represented to be. Manchester

had never had a writer to depict its varied life, and had Mrs. Gaskell not been a busy wife and mother, there might have been many more Manchester stories. As one of her friends of these Manchester days says : " If she had only had more time to devote to writing, she could have given us much more than her eight books, and even have given us better books than the best which she produced."

But she had many claims on her time and strength, and the wonder is that she produced so much. Her life was very full before she became an author. What it was afterwards can be better imagined than described. We owe many of these inimitable stories to the hours snatched from sleep, for sometimes she would write far into the night ; at others, she rose very early in the mornings to write down " the fast flowing thoughts ere they had flown as the morning dawned."

Continuing the debate on North *versus* South, the novelist says :

"'You do not know the South, Mr. Thornton,' Margaret Hale concluded, collapsing into a determined silence, and angry with herself for having said so much.

" ' And may I say you do not know the North ?' asked he, with an inexpressible gentleness in his tone, as he saw that he had really hurt her. She continued resolutely silent ; yearning after the lovely haunts she had left far away in Hampshire, with a passionate longing that made her feel her voice would be unsteady and trembling if she spoke."

To those who have lived at one time in the North and afterwards in the South of England, it is remarkable to find how well the novelist has gauged both parts of the country, and how fair she is to each. Her keen observation had shown her the best and also the worst sides of the characters of the people in the

different districts. John Thornton is an excellent type of the best of the North Country manufacturers, and his mother is drawn with a skill which could only be gained from actual acquaintance with such characters.

The more we know of Mrs. Gaskell's life, the more we admire her unflagging industry. Had she never written a line, she would have been remembered in Manchester as a very busy, hardworking woman, who had accomplished much more than could be expected from an average minister's wife. "No wonder I have become old before my time," writes the novelist in later years. Every moment of her life was occupied. She was always what the Lancashire people call "throng," and her life was a many-sided one—as wife, mother, Sunday School teacher, district visitor, general adviser to her friends, a valuable helper to the poor and needy, and, in addition, a charming hostess, who was always ready to entertain her guests of any station in life with womanly tact and gracious simplicity.

Domestic duties occupied the greater part of her time. Margaret Hale, as a visitor among the poor, is an unconscious portrait of Mrs. Gaskell in her younger days, and much of the serene happiness of her early married life creeps into the noble characters which make her stories so purely simple and homely. The virtues inculcated were such as she valued, and which she conscientiously practised in her daily life. The "fruits of the Spirit" were ever present in her home. It was this genial atmosphere which was felt by all who knew her, and which also accounts for the fact that she was relieved from the domestic worry arising from the proverbial servant trouble. One servant—Hearn—established a record by living with the family over fifty years. She died at Plymouth Grove, and from there she was buried and mourned as a friend.

The house in Rumford Street always had sacred memories for Mrs. Gaskell. It was in this house that her only son, Willie, was born in 1843. There were three daughters, and the birth of a son brought additional joy to the parents. He was to be the pride of the home, and to carry forward the honoured name of Gaskell to succeeding generations. He was named William after his father and both his grandfathers. His possible future with such a mother and father was a subject discussed by the many friends of the family, but his precious life was short. When he was only ten months old, Mrs. Gaskell took him along with their eldest daughter, Marianne, to one of their favourite holiday resorts, Festiniog, in North Wales, which held happy memories of their honeymoon. Whilst staying there, the daughter contracted scarlet fever at the little inn in which they were spending their holiday. When she was sufficiently well to run the risk of a change, she was taken with the baby brother to a pretty watering-place, Port Madoc, a short distance away. The baby had probably contracted the disease before they left Festiniog, for soon after reaching Port Madoc, the little fellow sickened of fever and died.

This, the first break in the happy family circle, was the greatest sorrow that ever overtook Mrs. Gaskell. She was far from strong when she went to Festiniog, and the anxiety caused by her daughter's illness reduced the little strength she had. Then, after the change to Port Madoc, from which so much was expected during the convalescence of the daughter, Marianne, and the anxious mother, came the short illness of her only boy, followed by his ever lamented death. To a constitution far from strong, this last severe blow was almost too much to be borne, and it well-nigh shattered the delicate life of the agonised mother.

The summer of 1844 was long regarded as a " black time " in which the hope and pride of the family were taken away, and yet how much the death of that little boy has meant to Manchester, nay, to almost the whole literary world ! For it was his death that caused the novelist to turn her thoughts to the writing of a long story in order to soothe her sorrow. The eight volumes of this sorrowing mother's works form a fitting memorial to little Willie Gaskell.

It was months before she could take up the threads of her busy life again. This overwhelming sorrow had left her an invalid, suffering from nervous prostration, brought on by the strain of all she had passed through in these terribly anxious days. Her energy had left her, and life seemed hard and difficult. Her thoughts were continually dwelling on " what might have been." Everything that could be done to alleviate her sufferings was done, and it was evident to her devoted husband, who himself was feeling heavily the loss of his only son, that some effort must be made to rouse his sorrowing wife from the depressed state into which their bereavement had left her. Like Phillis, mourning for the loss of her lover, the time had come when it was necessary for someone to act as Betty, the old servant, did, and to arouse Mrs. Gaskell to do something for herself.

Mr. Gaskell, knowing how absorbed his wife became in her literary work, suggested the writing of a long story to beguile the tedious hours which she was forced to spend on her couch. It was a happy thought, for whilst Mr. Gaskell had health and was able to engage his thoughts in ministering to others, his wife was denied the inestimable blessing of active work in which to assuage her grief. The benefit derived from enforced exertion in times of anxiety and grief is well brought out by the novelist in the case of *Mary Barton :*

"Oh! I do think that the necessity for exertion, for some kind of action (bodily or mentally) in time of distress, is a most infinite blessing, although the first efforts at such seasons are painful. Something to be done implies that there is yet hope of some good thing to be accomplished; or some additional evil that may be avoided, and by degrees the hope absorbs much of the sorrow. It is the woes that cannot in any earthly way be escaped, that admit least earthly comforting. Of all trite, worn-out, hollow mockeries of comfort that were ever uttered by people who will not take the trouble of sympathizing with others, the one I dislike the most is the exhortation not to grieve over an event, 'for it cannot be helped.' Do you think if I could help it, I would sit still with folded hands, content to mourn? Do you not believe that as long as hope remained I would be up and doing? I mourn because what has occurred cannot be helped. The reason you give me for not grieving, is the very and sole reason of my grief. Give me nobler and higher reasons for enduring meekly what my Father sees fit to send, and I will try earnestly and faithfully to be patient; but mock me not, or any other mourner, with the speech, 'Do not grieve, for it cannot be helped. It is past remedy.'"

Mrs. Gaskell received many letters of condolence from friends and relatives on the death of her little boy, but none seemed to be able to give her the comfort she required. Writing on this subject, she says: "I had a letter from Clement; I knew he felt his friend's death deeply, but I should never have learnt it from the letter he sent. It was formal; it seemed like chaff to my hungering heart. Poor fellow! I dare say he had found it hard to write. What could he—or anyone—say to a mother, who had lost her child? The world does not think so, and, in general, one must

conform to the customs of the world; but, judging from my own experience, I should say that reverent silence, at such times, is the tenderest balm."

And, again, writing of her sorrow, she says: "There are stages in the contemplation and endurance of great sorrow, which endow men with the same earnestness, and clearness of thought, that in some of old, took the form of Prophecy. To those who have large capability of loving and suffering, united with great power of firm endurance, there comes a time in their woe, when they are lifted out of the contemplation of their individual case into the searching inquiry into the nature of their calamity, and the remedy (if remedy there be) which may prevent its recurrence to others as well as to themselves. Hence the beautiful, noble efforts which are from time to time brought to light, as being continuously made by those who have once hung on the cross of agony, in order that others may not suffer as they have done; one of the grandest ends which sorrow can accomplish. The sufferer wrestling with God's messenger until a blessing is left behind, not for one alone, but for generations."

Writing always had a fascination for Mrs. Gaskell, but she had never had the necessary time for the production of a long story, much as she had wished it. So far as is known, her pen had been laid aside since 1836, when she and her husband wrote their one joint poem, except for the short paper on *A Visit to Clopton House*, written in 1838. It has been suggested that *Lizzie Leigh* was written previously to *Mary Barton*, although it was not published until 1850. If that is so, it is one more case of a short story on a given subject preceding a longer one. Before *Cranford* came *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*. *Sylvia's Lovers* was anticipated in *The Manchester Marriage*, and *Cousin Phillis* introduces the vicinity

of Knutsford again, before *Wives and Daughters* was written.

It is evident from Mrs. Gaskell's own words in the preface to the original edition of *Mary Barton* in 1848, that she hailed the diversion of writing a long story with a certain amount of satisfaction, partly because she ever loved to acquiesce in her husband's wishes and suggestions, and also because she had often wished to try her wings in the realms of literature, by writing a long story. She admits that she did not set out with the intention of writing a purposeful story, but her own sorrow led her almost unconsciously to write of the sorrows of others, with a view to revealing the pitiful poverty of the poor. In *Mary Barton*, the novelist tells a plain, unvarnished tale of woe, which was true to life. If it erred at all, it erred in not painting Manchester life amongst the poor as black as it really was, though every detail showed her familiarity with her subject. The little tea parties in the back alleys and the interior view of Alice Wilson's humble underground dwelling could only have been drawn by one who had the skill of an artist, together with a mother's sympathy for suffering humanity. This story was told at an opportune time, when the rich and the poor were "poles asunder," and needed someone to bridge the gulf between. Mrs. Gaskell once told Travers Madge, a Unitarian minister in Manchester, who, like Mrs. Gaskell's own father, gave up preaching for conscientious reasons, that the wish to write such a book as *Mary Barton* came to her when she was visiting a labourer's cottage in one of the poverty-stricken districts of Manchester. She was trying to sympathize with, and at the same time to allay the bitterness towards the rich, which was the constant feeling of the poor, when the father of the family gripped her arm, saying: "Ay,

ma'am ; but have you ever seen a child clemmed to death ? "

This sad incident, which burnt itself into Mrs. Gaskell's mind, is used in *Mary Barton*, and when her own sorrow came, she found the opportunity for fulfilling this wish, though at first she planned another tale, which was probably worked out in one of her short stories later on.

In the preface to *Mary Barton*, the novelist says : " Three years ago I became anxious (from circumstances that need not be more fully alluded to) to employ myself in writing a work of fiction. Living in Manchester, but with a deep relish and fond admiration for the country, my first thought was to find a frame-work for my story in some rural scene ; and I had already made a little progress in a tale, the period of which was more than a century ago, and the place on the borders of Yorkshire, when I bethought me how deep might be the romance in the lives of some of those who elbowed me daily in the busy streets of the town in which I resided. I had always felt a deep sympathy with the careworn men, who looked as if doomed to struggle through their lives in strange alternations between work and want ; tossed to and fro by circumstances, apparently in even a greater degree than other men. A little manifestation of this sympathy, and a little attention to the expression of feelings on the part of some of the workpeople with whom I was acquainted, had laid open to me the hearts of one or two of the more thoughtful among them ; I saw that they were sore and irritable against the rich, the even tenor of whose seemingly happy lives appeared to increase the anguish caused by the lottery-like nature of their own. Whether the bitter complaints made by them of the neglect which they experienced from the prosperous—especially from the

masters whose fortunes they had helped to build up —were well founded or no, it is not for me to judge. It is enough to say, that this belief of the injustice and unkindness which they endure from their fellow-creatures taints what might be resignation to God's will, and turns it to revenge in many of the poor, uneducated factory workers of Manchester. The more I reflected on this unhappy state of things between those so bound to each other by common interests as the employers and the employed must ever be, the more anxious I became to give some utterance to the agony which, from time to time, convulses these dumb people ; the agony of suffering without the sympathy of the happy, or of erroneously believing that such is the case. If it be an error that the woes, which come with ever returning tide-like flood to overwhelm the workmen in our manufacturing towns, pass unregarded by all but the sufferers, it is at any rate an error so bitter in its consequences to all parties, that whatever public effort can do in the way of merciful deeds, or helpless love in the way of ' widows' mites ' could do, should be done, and that speedily, to disabuse the workpeople of so miserable a misapprehension. At present they seem to me to be left in a state, wherein lamentations and tears are thrown aside as useless, but in which the lips are compressed for curses, and the hands clenched and ready to smite."

It was well that Mrs. Gaskell wrote a tale of real Manchester life as she saw it, rather than an imaginative story on what took place more than a hundred years before. Moods and temperaments influence fiction more than is sometimes apparent, and it would not have been easy for her to throw her thoughts back more than a century in a place not over familiar to her. Instead of being a relief to her fagged energies, it would have taxed the small amount of nerve power

that she had, for she would have been writing of what others had seen and known rather than from actual experience, and in this kind of writing she never excelled. It is well that she bethought her of "the romance in the lives of those around her," for she could write with a wingèd pen of the sorrows of others, having a poignant grief of her own, and witnessing the hard lot of those who struggled on, as without hope.

The original edition of *Mary Barton* is prefaced by a verse from Uhland's poem, of which Dr. Ward has given the following translation in his admirable introduction to *Mary Barton*:

> "Take, good ferrymen, I pray,
> Take a triple fare to-day;
> The twain who with me touched the strand
> Were visitants from spirit-land."

These lines probably refer to the two children that Mrs. Gaskell had lost—her first baby, who was still-born, and her only son, Willie. All Mrs. Gaskell's daughters had a part in her literary work, in one way or another, and it seems as if she meant to sanctify the lives of her departed children by also giving them a share in her life's work.

Mary Barton was begun shortly after her little boy died, in 1844, and it was completed some little time after her youngest child, Julia, was born, on September 3rd, 1846. The fond parents had hoped for a little boy to take the place of their lost Willie, and it was just a shadow of disappointment to find the new baby was a girl. This, however, was soon forgotten, for the youngest child was an unspeakable blessing to her home, and did more than anything else to cheer the broken heart of the mother. It was little Julia, affectionately called "Jewel" by her own family, who fascinated Charlotte Brontë when visiting the Gaskells in 1851. She was then a lovely little

girl of five, and Charlotte Brontë, writing to Mrs. Gaskell, says: "Could you manage to convey a small kiss to that dear but dangerous little person, Julia? She surreptitiously possessed herself of a minute fraction of my heart, which has been missing ever since I saw her." And again, "Give my dear love to Meta and Marianne, dear, happy girls as they are. You cannot now transmit my message to Flossy and Julia"; and afterwards, referring to little Julia: "I prized the little wild-flower—not that I think the sender cares for me; she *does* not, and *cannot*, for she does not know me; but no matter. In my reminiscences she is a person of a certain distinction. I think hers a fine little nature, frank and of genuine promise. I often see her, as she appeared, stepping supreme from the portico, towards the carriage, that evening we went to see *Twelfth Night*. I believe in Julia's future. I like what speaks in her movements and what is written upon her face." Mrs. Gaskell copied these extracts into the biography of Charlotte Brontë with a mother's pardonable pride.

In the chapter, "With the Dying," in *Mary Barton*, the novelist speaks of seeing her boy in her dreams: "And what if in dreams (that land into which no sympathy nor love can penetrate with another, either to share its bliss or its agony,—that land whose scenes are unspeakable terrors, are hidden mysteries, are priceless treasures to one alone—that land where alone I may see, while yet I tarry here, the sweet looks of my dear child)." In the earlier part of the book is a description of an agonised mother, watching over her twin boys who were ill with fever. It is noticeable that all the illnesses which she described are fevers, and her death-bed scenes are in a fever-stricken room. One of the twins dies quietly, and in the description of the "passing" of the other little patient, Mrs.

Gaskell is evidently speaking from her own experience. "'Is there any chance for the other one, think you?' . . . The other child gasped longer, louder, with more effort. 'We mun get him away from his mother. He cannot die while she's wishing him.' 'Wishing him?' said Mary, in a tone of inquiry. 'Ay; dunno' ye know what "wishing" means? There's none can die in the arms of those who are wishing them sore to stay on earth. The soul o' them as holds them won't let the dying soul go free; so it has a hard struggle for the quiet of death, poor lile fellow.' So without circumlocution she went and offered to take the sinking child. But the mother would not let him go, and looking in Alice's face with brimming and imploring eyes, declared, in earnest whispers, that she was not wishing him, that she would fain have him released from his suffering. Alice and Mary stood by with eyes fixed on the poor child, whose struggles seemed to increase, till at last his mother said, with a choking voice :—'May happen yo'd better take him, Alice; I believe my heart's wishing him a' this while, for I cannot, no, I cannot bring myself to let my two childer go in one day; I cannot help longing to keep him, and yet he shan't suffer longer for me.'

"She bent down and fondly, oh! with what passionate fondness, kissed the child, and then gave him up to Alice, who took him with tender care. Nature's struggles were soon exhausted, and he breathed his little life away in peace." These words, written with all the pathos of a bereaved mother, were penned with tears, for Mrs. Gaskell sorrowed over her characters in her stories, as if they were real, and not merely, as we know they so often were, founded on reality.

Maria Edgeworth said that "*Mary Barton* contains

too many death-bed scenes," but it should be remembered that it was a death-bed which turned Mrs. Gaskell's thoughts to the writing of this pathetic story. Her own heart-break found its solace in showing what others were suffering.

Whilst visiting among the poor of Manchester, her heart had often ached to find so much misery, and she was often sorely tried to obtain a remedy. She longed unutterably for a voice that would reach those who had the power to alleviate the misery and poverty that she knew to abound in those manufacturing districts.

" You cannot read the lot of those who daily pass you by in the street. How do you know the wild romances of their lives, the trials, the temptations they are even now enduring, resisting, sinking under ? You may be elbowed one instant by the girl desperate in her abandonment, laughing in mad merriment with her outward gesture, while her soul is longing for the rest of the dead, and bringing itself to think of the cold flowing river as the only mercy of God remaining to her here. You may pass the criminal, meditating crimes at which you will to-morrow shudder with horror as you read them. You may push against one, humble and unnoticed, the last upon earth, who, in heaven, will for ever be in the immediate light of God's countenance. Errands of mercy—errands of sin—did you ever think where all the thousands of people you daily meet are bound ? "

The reference to criminals meditating crimes draws attention to the bitter feelings of the workpeople towards their masters. In the murder of Mr. Carson by John Barton, the novelist shows the pent-up hatred of the operatives against their employers ; and it was possibly suggested by actual facts, for on January 3rd, 1831, a Mr. Thomas Ashton, of Werneth,

was cruelly murdered under circumstances somewhat similar to those of Mr. Carson's secret assassination. At a meeting of workpeople, three men were made responsible for the shooting of the employer, but the actual criminals were not discovered for three years, and then only by one of the three murderers turning King's evidence. When *Mary Barton* was first published, this account of the murder of young Carson was thought by some to refer to the sensational murder of nearly twenty years before, and members of the murdered man's family were pained because particulars in reference to the Carson family were attributed to them. Mrs. Gaskell very much regretted the pain which she had quite unintentionally caused to the innocent members of the Ashton family. She said: "The whole tale grew up in my mind as imperceptibly as a seed germinates in the earth." It took three years to write, and the latter portion had to be done at uncertain intervals, but the greater part was written between the death of one child and the birth of another.

Possibly the story would never have been finished if it had not been for the kindly help and encouragement which the novelist got from her husband. His hand may be traced in the appropriate quotations at the head of the thirty-eight chapters. His fondness for expressing himself in poetry, especially in the homely verses, which told of the virtues of the poor, made it an easy task for him to compose suitable verses or to help in choosing others from well-known writers. His knowledge of the Lancashire dialect, and the accurate information he possessed on the subject of his wife's story, together with his keen interest, were of immense value, as he was able to act not only as censor, but also as adviser.

To those who were familiar with Manchester at this

time, the story easily revealed the district and the true life of the cotton operatives. Every detail is so faithful, and shows Mrs. Gaskell's intimate knowledge of the lives of those around her during the trying time of the "hungry forties." The distress in Manchester was typical of the condition of other Lancashire towns, and the workers of these surrounding districts were just as grateful to her for the graphic story as were the operatives in Manchester. A working man from Oldham was so touched by the faithful story, that he showed his gratitude by making a pilgrimage to Plymouth Grove once a year, accompanied by his children, in order to show them the house in which the author of *Mary Barton* had lived.

The first chapter of *Mary Barton* takes the readers to a district well known to old residents of bygone Manchester as Greenheys Fields. The description given by Mrs. Gaskell of this once truly rural spot, just outside the busy city, is very beautiful. Its beauty has long since departed, but it is well to have Mrs. Gaskell's word-picture of what Greenheys Fields was to past generations. One of the many streets in Greenheys is known as Barton Street, but there is no street that is associated with the honoured name of Gaskell. It is difficult for strangers to believe that this district once had a charm about it because of its rural beauty, and that this was a holiday resort for the Manchester toilers. The black-and-white farmhouses are gone, and rows of small houses cover the site. Mrs. Gaskell mentions "the haymaking and the ploughing, which are such pleasant mysteries for the town's people to watch, and here the artisan, deafened with noise of tongues and engines, may come to listen awhile to the delicious sounds of rural life, the lowing of cattle, the milkmaid's call, the

cackle of poultry in the old farm-yards." The novelist often walked from Upper Rumford Street with her children to these fields at Greenheys, which brought to mind the early days before her marriage, and it was at Greenheys where Mr. Turner lived for the last seventeen years of his life.

The description of these fields, which she describes so modestly and withal so graphically, is a picture drawn from life: "You cannot wonder, then, that these fields are popular places of resort at every holiday time; and you would not wonder, if you could see, or I properly describe, the charm of one particular stile, that it should be, on such occasions, a crowded halting-place. Close by it is a deep, clear pond, reflecting in its dark green depths the shadowy trees that bend over it to exclude the sun. The only place where its banks are shelving is on the side next to a rambling farm-yard, belonging to one of those of the old-world, gabled, black-and-white houses I named above, overlooking the field through which the public footpath leads. The porch of this farm-house is covered by a rose tree; and the little garden surrounding it is crowded with a medley of old-fashioned herbs and flowers, planted long ago, when the garden was the only druggist's shop within reach, and allowed to grow in scrambling and wild luxuriance—roses, lavender, sage, balm (for tea), rosemary, pinks, and wallflowers, onions, and jessamine, in most republican and indiscriminate order. This farm-house and garden are within a hundred yards of the stile of which I spoke, leading from the large pasture field into a smaller one, divided by a hedge of hawthorn and blackthorn; and near this stile, on the further side, there runs a tale that primroses may often be found, and occasionally the blue, sweet violet on the grassy hedge-back."

Mrs. Gaskell published this first book anonymously under the pseudonym of Cotton Mather Mills, Esq., and as it deals with events which centre round the cotton mills of Manchester, the name is appropriate. She was extremely shy in acknowledging the authorship of the novel. On one occasion, when the subject was discussed in the presence of some friends, she suddenly popped down under the table, pretending to look for something which was not there. This was descried by at least one of those present.

The first chapter settled the question. "Whoever wrote it knew Manchester and Manchester folk well, and lived not far from that city," was the general verdict, and it did not take very long to trace the author to her home. Many people guessed at once that it had been written by a woman. The exquisite descriptions of the interior of the homes and the discussion of "the woman's question" showed a feminine touch. None but a woman and a mother, who had had experience of Manchester life, could have revealed the feminine characters as they appear in the pages of the book. Manchester people soon recognised Greenheys Fields, and the fact that they had been described in a book increased their popularity, and caused crowds to visit them. "There are some fields near Manchester, well known to the inhabitants as 'Green Heys Fields,' through which runs a public footpath to a little village about two miles distant. In spite of these fields being flat, and low, nay, in spite of the want of wood (the great and usual recommendation of level tracts of land), there is a charm about them which strikes even the inhabitant of a mountainous district, who sees and feels the effect of contrast in these commonplace, but thoroughly rural fields, with the busy, bustling manufacturing town he left but half-an-hour ago. Here and there,

an old black-and-white farm-house, with its rambling outbuildings, speaks of other times and other occupations than those which now absorb the population of the neighbourhood."

This is the Greenheys district, with its Pepperhill Farm, as it appeared to Mrs. Gaskell when *Mary Barton* was published.

Greenheys derived its name from De Quincey's old home, "Green Hay," a picturesque house in the neighbourhood, surrounded by extensive grounds. It was built by De Quincey's father in 1791. The house has long ago been demolished, but the site can be pointed out to his devotees, though the generation that remembers it is fast passing away. Not far from the Pepperhill Farm lived Geraldine Jewsbury with her brother, in Carlton Terrace ; and here Carlyle and Emerson visited them in the forties. James Anthony Froude also lived in Greenheys in 1850. It was at only a short distance from Greenheys that Charlotte Brontë lodged with her father, when he came to have the operation for cataract in the eyes in the year 1846. Here Charlotte Brontë stayed for a month, and while here she started her masterpiece, *Jane Eyre.*

The old black-and-white farm-house described by Mrs. Gaskell was a comparatively modern structure compared with Pepperhill Cottage, which adjoined it, and which was simply an old-fashioned country cottage, dating from the earlier part of the seventeenth century. Both the farm-house and the cottage were pulled down in the year 1900. Antiquarians of the district were interested to find, when the building was demolished, that it had been constructed of oak quarter framing, the joints being fastened with oak pegs, and the spars between the framing being filled in with clay, plastered upon bulrushes, instead of laths, to give the wall solidity.

Another old black-and-white farm-house in Greenheys Fields was Moss Grove Farm, which for more than three hundred years was tenanted by a member of the Chadwick family.

The pleasant literary associations of the picturesque Pepperhill Farm have made it a favourite subject among local artists. Many drawings in crayon and water-colour, and numerous photographs exist, not only in Manchester, but in many other places. One painting by a well-known local artist has found its way to America, where Mrs. Gaskell's books have always been very much appreciated. When *Mary Barton* was first published, the farm, the stile, and the lane were readily recognised, and it became a favourite walk on Saturday and Sunday afternoons for the workpeople from the busy, crowded districts, and here, book in hand, many read the description of their favourite spot. The actual site of Pepperhill Farm is now part of a public recreation ground, and so the merry voices of the children can still be heard in this once familiar holiday haunt.

The opening chapters of *Mary Barton* refer to a part of Greenheys on which now stands the Moss Side Public Library, which contains a unique collection of Mrs. Gaskell's works, in nearly all the different editions.

Mrs. Gaskell's first book was brought to the notice of many publishers before it found a sympathetic "reader." The manuscript eventually came into the hands of Mr. John Forster, the well-known literary critic and editor of the *Examiner*, who also found time to act as "reader" to Messrs. Chapman & Hall. Mr. Forster was keenly interested in this first novel by an unknown writer, not only for the literary ability which it showed, but because of the purpose of the story, although when he afterwards came to know the author, he told her that the book was not without

its faults, and if she would not be too discouraged and dismayed, he would write her a letter pointing out the weaknesses of the story. Mrs. Gaskell was glad to receive the proffered letter, and doubtless the help which she got from so great a critic was of service to her in writing her subsequent novels.

Messrs. Chapman & Hall, after keeping the manuscript for a year, until Mrs. Gaskell says "she had forgotten all about it," accepted it, paying one hundred pounds for the copyright, a bargain which must have proved of great advantage to the firm, for, besides the big sale in England and America, the book was translated into French, German, Spanish, Hungarian, and Finnish. The amount paid in coin was small, but it brought what was worth more than gold to the writer, for she had her reward in knowing that her plea for the poor had gone forth to spread its message amongst those who had it in their power to alleviate the lot of the oppressed in whatever district they might live, and it drew the attention of the public to the misery of the cotton operatives in Lancashire. Added to this, she at one bound became known as a distinguished author, and what she said and wrote afterwards carried weight and conviction.

Her leap into fame was sudden, for, like Byron, "she woke one morning to find herself famous," and an open door was ready afterwards to receive her contributions to literature. Many of the great writers of the day hastened to congratulate her, and she at once took her place among them. Her admirers included Ruskin, Kingsley, Carlyle, Landor, Dean Stanley, Jowett, Cobden, and, the most enthusiastic of all, Charles Dickens, who later wrote asking her to contribute to his *Household Words*, even offering to go to Manchester to talk the matter over with her: "I should set a value on your help, which your modesty

could hardly imagine, and I am perfectly sure that the least result of your reflection or observation in respect of the life around you would attract attention and do good. My great and unaffected admiration of your book makes me very earnest in all relating to you."

That a plain account of humble Manchester life should be good enough for a story-book was a revelation to those simple, hard-working Manchester folk. Many of them were good prototypes of John Barton and his daughter, and Job Leigh "was mine own familiar friend." There was more than one home similar to the one described by Mrs. Gaskell, where the whole of the parlour or houseplace was a museum filled with interesting collections of little value to any but the owner.

The women weavers in some of the factories "clubbed" together to obtain copies of the book which described the lives of the artisans so faithfully. It helped them to realise "the heights as well as the depths" of their nature. Indeed, they saw themselves as others saw them, and found in the pages of the book a better portrait of themselves than they would have believed to be possible, for the hand that drew them revealed the unconscious beauty of the characters under their rough exterior.

Immediately the book was published, Mrs. Gaskell distributed the first parcel, which reached her at 121, Rumford Street, amongst her own family and the girls in her Sunday School class. Those fortunate girls prized their copy of the first edition. There are still some copies of these kept as family treasures in several Manchester homes. In Mary Howitt's autobiography is a personal reference to the birth of *Mary Barton:* "My husband was so pleased with *Clopton Hall*, that he urged Mrs. Gaskell to use her pen for

the public benefit. This," she continues, "led to the production of the beautiful story of *Mary Barton*, the first volume of which was sent in manuscript to William Howitt as the result of his advice. We were both delighted with it, and a few months later, Mrs. Gaskell came up to London and over to our house with the work completed."

This account does not agree with the version given by Mrs. Gaskell's daughters, who give the credit to their father, although it is certain that William and Mary Howitt did encourage the novelist seriously to consider the writing of a book. It was not, however, altogether their suggestion that it should be " a story with a purpose." That was the joint wish of Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell. In a catalogue of autographs is to be found the following, signed by William Howitt : " Have you read *Mary Barton?* The book was written at my suggestion and disposed of by me. The authoress never wrote a book before."

It was not all praise that Mrs. Gaskell received. She got much blame from the Lancashire mill-owners and manufacturers. It was a bold step to attack those who were her neighbours, and, moreover, to give the actual name of the place in which the injustice, of which she was so conscious, was perpetrated. As might be expected, *Mary Barton* created a sensation not only in Manchester but throughout England, and, later, on the Continent. Whilst there were many who were grateful for a writer who could wield her pen to defend the poor, there were others who complained that the case for the operatives was too highly coloured, and that the case for the masters had not been fairly stated.

In the *Manchester Guardian*, in the early part of 1849, there are several reviews of the book, which criticise the policy of *Mary Barton* very severely. One says :

"It sinned generally against truth in matters of fact, either above the comprehension of the authoress or beyond her sphere of knowledge." Another speaks of Mrs. Gaskell's "morbid sensibility to the condition of the operatives," accusing the writer of having a grudge against the "gentry and landed aristocracy."

Her most formidable censor was Mr. William Rathbone Greg, who, from what seems to be a sheer love of opposition and adverse criticism, took the side of the masters against the workpeople, but the reading of his comments does not convince, for he cannot find a parallel amongst the well-to-do to compare with the abject poverty and misery of the poor operatives. He brings forward the old threadbare plea of improvidence against the working classes, and gives an example of a thrifty, careful couple, who saved out of their scanty earnings, and became the possessors of their own cottage, and were prepared for "a rainy day." That many of the poor in Manchester were extravagant in matters of food and clothing when times were good, Mrs. Gaskell was quite prepared to admit, but what she deplored was the want of sympathy between the rich and the poor; the line of demarcation was too rigid, and, without unduly blaming either side, she strove for a better understanding, so that where the poor erred on the side of ignorance, the educated and wealthy might help by mixing with them to assist them to improve. "Surely it is part of God's plan, that so much of the burden of the suffering as can be should be lightened by those whom it is His pleasure to make happy and content in their own circumstances."

In her visits to the poor, she found the rich conspicuous by their absence in the squalid quarters of the city, and, what was worse, she found a bitter resentment against them—there was no fellow-feeling

in suffering. "It's the poor, and the poor only, that does such things for the poor." Even the parson was classed with the rich, and his visits were not always welcome. In *North and South* the retired clergyman, Mr. Hale, does duty for several of the novelist's ministerial friends. One, Mr. Travers Madge, who, as we have mentioned, had, like Mr. Hale, given up preaching for conscience' sake, worked hand in hand with Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell in trying to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. In *North and South,* Higgins, the Manchester weaver, and Mr. Hale have a serious conversation, which, to those who knew Lancashire in the forties and fifties, savours of the brusque outspokenness of the mill operatives with regard to religion. Lancashire operatives pride themselves on believing in a practical religion, or none at all.

"'As I was a-saying, sir, I reckon yo'd not ha' much belief in yo' if yo' lived here—if yo'd been bred here. I ax your pardon if I use wrong words, but what I mean by belief, just now, is a-thinking on sayings and maxims and promises made by folks yo' never saw, about the things and the life yo' never saw, nor no one else. Now, yo' say these are true things, and true sayings, and a true life. I just say, where's the proof? There's many and many a one wiser, and scores better learned than I am around me—folk who've had time to think on these things—while my time has had to be gi'en up to getting my bread. Well, I sees these people (the masters). Their lives is pretty much open to me. They're real folk. They don't believe i' the Bible—not they. They may say they do, for form sake; but, Lord, sir, d'ye think their first cry i' the morning is, "What shall I do to get hold on eternal life?" or "What shall I do to fill my purse this blessed day?" "Where shall I go?" "What bargains shall I strike?" The purse and the

gold and the notes is real things; things as can be felt and touched: them's realities; and eternal life is all a talk, very fit for—I ax your pardon, sir; yo'r a parson out o' work, I believe. Well! I'll never speak disrespectful of a man in the same fix as I'm in mysel'. But I'll just ax yo' another question, sir, and I dunnot want yo' to answer it, only to put it in yo'r pipe and smoke it, afore yo' go for to set down us, who only believe in what we see, as fools and noddies. If salvation, and life to come, and what not, was true,—not in men's words, but in men's hearts' core—dun yo' not think they'd din us wi' it as they do wi' political economy? They're mighty anxious to come round us wi' that piece o' wisdom, but t'other would be a greater convarsion, if it were true.'"

In the concluding chapters of *Mary Barton*, part of which had to be added at the request of the publishers to make the book the required size, Mrs. Gaskell gives a fine "summing up," which affords scope for her well-thought-out gospel to "defend the poor and fatherless, and see that such as are in need and necessity have right." Job Leigh echoes the novelist's thoughts: "'It seemed hard to him that a heap of gold should part him and his brother so far asunder. For he was a loving man before he grew mad with seeing such as he was slighted, as if Christ Himself had not been poor. At one time, I've heard him say, he felt kindly towards every man, rich or poor, because he thought they were all men alike. But latterly he grew aggravated with the sorrows and suffering that he saw, and which he thought the masters might help if they would. . . . For sure, sir, you'll own it's come to a hard pass when a man would give aught in the world for work to keep his children from starving, and can't get a bit, if he's ever so willing to labour.'"

There are passages in *Mary Barton* that show the novelist at her best. The description of Mary's journey from the Liverpool Docks is one of her finest word-pictures. The reader holds his breath whilst he almost feels the moving boat, and hears the splash of the oars which propel the small craft to its destination. "The boat threaded her way through the maze of larger vessels which surrounded the shore, bumping against one, kept off by the oars from going right against another, overshadowed by a third, until at length they were fairly out on the broad river, away from either shore; the sights and sounds of lands being heard in the distance. . . . .

"There was not a breath of air, and yet it was colder than when the soft violence of the westerly wind had been felt. The men renewed their efforts. The boat gave a bound forwards at every pull of the oars. The water was glassy and motionless, reflecting tint by tint of the Indian-ink sky above. Mary shivered, and her heart sank within her. Still, now they evidently were making progress. Then the steersman pointed to a rippling line on the river only a little way off, and the men disturbed Mary, who was watching the ships that lay in what appeared to her to be the open sea, to get at their sails.

"She gave a little start, and rose. Her patience, her grief, and perhaps her silence had begun to win upon the men.

"'Yon second to the norrard is the *John Cropper*. Wind's right now, and sails will soon carry us alongside of her.'"

And then comes the cry from the sailor, shouted through the speaking tube made by his rough, hoary hands. "'We're come for one William Wilson, who is wanted to prove an *alibi* in Liverpool Assize Courts to-morrow. James Wilson is to be tried for a murder

done on Thursday night when he was with William Wilson.'" "'Anything more, missis?'" asked the boatman of Mary, in a lower voice, and taking his hands down from his mouth.

"'Say I'm Mary Barton. Oh, the ship is going on! Oh! for the love of Heaven, ask them to stop.'

"The ship flew along—away—the boat struggled after," and after a time of suspense, Mary Barton succeeds in getting William Wilson to leave the *John Cropper* and return in a pilot boat, to prove an *alibi* in Liverpool Assize Court.

Mary Barton's confession of love in the trial scene is another of Mrs. Gaskell's sympathetic touches. She believed in these poor people, and their love affairs were worth her sincere sympathy.

Mary Barton was dramatised as *The Long Strike* in 1867, nineteen years after its publication, but it did not have a very long run, probably because it was written for a stated time and for a fixed purpose, and also because it was so very sad. Mrs. Gaskell afterwards acknowledged that she ought to have given it more light touches to relieve the gloom of so many death-bed scenes, but she questioned if she could have written otherwise, for she was not in a mood to write anything humorous, and she was not dealing with a page in history that could lend itself to humour.

Slavery had been abolished in the English Possessions, but in Manchester were to be found many who might have been called the white slaves of England. They were mere wrecks of humanity, toiling at the machines which hardly earned for them sufficient to keep body and soul together. This struggle with poverty under such miserable conditions was ever before Mrs. Gaskell as a problem which should be solved, but the difficulty was—how to solve it. The young minister and his wife had many a heartache

when leaving these poverty-stricken homes. Many a delicacy prepared by Mrs. Gaskell's own hands found its way to these poor, underground dwellings.

One of the saddest things in connection with this poverty in Manchester was the hopeless indifference which the poor manifested. All the courage and self-confidence had gone, if, indeed, they had ever existed, and the women—wives and mothers, in many cases—toiled in the heated atmosphere of the cotton mills under conditions which gave little prospect of health and strength to the succeeding generation. The industrial conditions were more disastrous than they need have been, owing to the lack of knowledge of the most elementary rules of health. What could be expected of the children of the Manchester streets? They were poor, sickly, undersized boys and girls, wrongly and insufficiently fed, scantily clothed, badly housed, and often left for hours to "fend for themselves," the older members of the family being at work in the factories. Even children of eight years of age were employed as "half-timers" in the mills, dragged out of bed before six o'clock in the morning, and sent out, often shoeless, to the factory, to work as "tenters" for the weavers, and as "bobbiners" for the spinners. The associations of mill life were often coarse and brutal, and the moral atmosphere was not always pure. These conditions were generally considered to be inevitable, and the laws of Political Economy were often cited in support of them. Factory legislation intended to remove some of the most evident abuses was bitterly opposed by those who benefited by the existing conditions.

Mrs. Gaskell had tried to understand the case, and had gone so far as to read Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, in spite of her modest disclaimer, where she says: "I know nothing of political economy, or the

theories of trade. I have tried to write truthfully; and if my account agree or clash with any system, the agreement or disagreement is unintentional." Even the novelist's most censorious opponent, William Rathbone Greg, admitted that *Mary Barton* was a labour of love, written with a most earnest and benevolent purpose, and what Mrs. Gaskell said in one of her later books, applies equally well to her first novel: "I tried," she said, "to make the story and the writing as quiet as I could, in order that people might not say that they could not see what the writer felt to be a very plain and earnest truth, for romantic incident or exaggerated writing."

It is evident that Mr. and Mrs. Howitt encouraged Mrs. Gaskell to keep up her writing on Manchester life, even though *Mary Barton* did not readily get accepted by the publishers, for in the first volumes of *Howitt's Journal* of 1847 are to be found three short stories, under the title of *Life in Manchester: Libbie Marsh's Three Eras*, by Cotton Mather Mills. The three eras are St. Valentine's Day, Whitsuntide, and Michaelmas. The story is carefully planned, and works out to a still more beautiful ending. Its very simplicity shows the rough Lancashire courtesy, which, if brusque, is not the less genuine, and comes out so naturally and so pleasantly. A kind look, a gracious word, or a noble action appealed to Mrs. Gaskell, and she knew how to make the best of her observations.

Critics have made disparaging remarks about her simple short stories, but she always aimed at a purpose more than mere literary excellence, and was more pleased to use her pen in illustrating the beauty of homely virtues, than in writing a learned article; she wrote for humanity's sake rather than for art's sake. When writing these little Lancashire sketches, Mrs. Gaskell always had her Sunday School scholars in mind,

and some of her short stories were published in the popular magazines for the benefit of the working classes.

St. Valentine's Day gives a very correct account of the happy associations of that day, as kept up by the Manchester working classes; and in the buying of a canary as a Valentine for "little Franky," there is a clear evidence of the humorous spirit which later came to be associated with *Cranford*. Libbie Marsh, the plain little heroine, goes to a bird fancier to buy a canary, and having made the purchase, asks: "'What's his name? I did not rightly catch it.'" "'Jupiter—it's not common; but the town's o'errun with Bobbies and Dickies, and as my birds are thought a bit out o' the way, I like to have better names for 'em, so I just picked a few out o' my lad's school-books. It's just as ready when you're used to it, to say Jupiter as Dicky.'" *Whitsuntide* is an exquisite description of the popular Manchester holiday, and the brief account shows Mrs. Gaskell's familiarity with every detail of that happy spring holiday. There is no reason to doubt that as a Sunday School teacher herself she once made one of the merry party, who went by canal-boat or conveyance to Dunham Park at the annual Whitsuntide Sunday School excursion, for every Sunday School teacher was glad and proud to accompany her scholars. She uses an angel's touch in describing this happy holiday in Dunham Woods, when everybody is at their best: "The soul grew much on this day, and in these woods, and all unconsciously, as souls do grow." "Long cherished quarrels had been forgotten, new friendships formed, fresh tastes and higher delights had been imparted that day." The blending of the grave and the gay is so well done, that critics have accused Mrs. Gaskell of trying to copy Dickens, but though Dickens may

have unconsciously influenced Mrs. Gaskell to a certain extent, yet the pathetic description of the little cripple reveals the true motherly heart which gave Mrs. Gaskell a unique position when writing of the sorrows of a mother, and it is well to remember that Mrs. Gaskell wrote these simple stories before she knew Charles Dickens, though she would probably have read his stories. The last "era"—*Michaelmas*—is the most touching, for it describes the funeral of Little Franky and the anguish of the mother. Once more we hear the refrain of her own sorrow. Michaelmas Day was the novelist's birthday, and, previous to the loss of her boy, had been a cheerful anniversary, but it was Michaelmas when her boy died, and it is not surprising that the third section of her story should be a sad one. Libbie Marsh, the heroine, is plain and poor, and an old maid; "just looking round for the odd jobs God leaves in the world for such as old maids to do. There's plenty of such work, and there's the blessing of God on them as does it."

The novelist concludes by pointing the moral: "Do you ever read the moral, concluding sentence of a story? I never do, but I once (in the year 1811, I think) heard of a deaf old lady, living by herself, who did; and, as she may have left some descendants, with the same amiable peculiarity, I will put in, for their benefit, what I believe to be the secret of Libbie's peace of mind, the real reason why she no longer feels oppressed at her own loneliness in the world—she has a purpose in life, and that purpose is a holy one."

In the second volume of *Howitt's Journal* appears *The Sexton's Hero*, referred to in the chapter on Silverdale. It was another Manchester story, though the scene is laid on the shores of Morecambe Bay, but Silverdale was the last parish in the diocese.

Christmas Storms and Sunshine, which opens with a political bias, in which the *Examiner* gets introduced under circumstances which raise a smile, is just the tale of a little neighbourly quarrel, which gets healed by the sorrow of a mother who needs help for her baby. The moral of the story is told with delightful frankness, for Mrs. Gaskell was writing under an assumed name, and she took it upon herself to give advice in her writings: "If any of you have any quarrels, or misunderstandings, or coolnesses, or cold shoulders, or shynesses, or tiffs, or miffs, or huffs, with any one else, just make friends before Christmas—you will be so much merrier if you do so. I ask it of you for the sake of that old angelic song, heard so many years ago by the shepherds."

These stories, written more than sixty years ago, may now seem to have a tendency to sermonising, but as Mrs. Gaskell grew in maturity, she became less didactic, and her horizon expanded. From simple Manchester stories for Lancashire people, she came to write for all sections of society and for almost every country. At a later period George Sand said: "Mrs. Gaskell has done what neither I nor other female writers in France can accomplish—she has written novels which excite the deepest interest in men of the world, and yet which every girl will be the better for reading."

The Repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 had brought happier days for the operatives in Manchester, and by the close of 1847 trade was reviving; the years of the "hungry forties" were over, and Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were relieved from the strain of constant visiting among the poor. Mr. Gaskell found time, in 1848, to give to private pupils (including Miss Catherine Winkworth, afterwards well-known for her *Lyra Germanica*) lessons in Greek, English literature, and

science. Then *Mary Barton* was accepted, and brighter times seemed to be in store for the hardworking young minister and his wife.

On May 12th of the following year Mrs. Gaskell was invited by Charles Dickens to the dinner given to celebrate the publication of *David Copperfield*, and there she met Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle, Thackeray, Rogers, Douglas Jerrold, Mr. and Mrs. Tagart, and several others. It was during this year that Mrs. Gaskell began to look round for a larger house, now that she was on visiting terms with many of the great in literature, and had taken her place as an author. A house in Rumford Street was hardly considered of sufficient importance to receive them if they returned her visits. Then there was the question of more room for her growing family. The year 1849 brought Mrs. Gaskell many opportunities of meeting distinguished people, for, besides being invited to the *David Copperfield* celebration, she had the honour of being invited to a breakfast party given by Samuel Rogers on May 7th, 1849. Rogers was now an old man of eighty-seven. On this occasion Mrs. Gaskell met Mr. Forster probably for the first time, Mrs. Dickens, and the Macreadys. Rogers' beautiful home, with its magnificent collection of paintings and old china, was much to her taste. Shortly afterwards, she was invited to dine with Mr. Forster in his chambers at the Middle Temple, where his collection of rare and beautiful books attracted her attention. In this same month she visited Carlyle in his Chelsea home, where he gave her an hour of his precious time, talking mostly about his own books, "lolling and fidgeting in his chair all the time." Another house to which she went as a distinguished guest was that of Monckton Milnes, where she met Guizot, Archdeacon Hare, and Frederick Denison Maurice, all of whom were charmed

with the author of *Mary Barton*, and found her conversation on social questions better than her books. Chevalier Bunsen was in Manchester in the September of this year, and Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were invited to meet him at the home of Mrs. Salis Schwabe. All these invitations show that Mrs. Gaskell had got into the best literary set of the day. Having got there, she never let herself slip out of it ; writing had become part of her daily duty, and she worked hard to keep up the reputation that her first book had given her.

One of Mrs. Gaskell's favourite texts was : " Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, that do with all thy might." " Just try for a day to think of all the odd jobs, as to be done well and truly as in God's sight—not just slurred over anyhow—and you'll go through them twice as cheerfully, and have no thought to spare for sighing or crying," was her practical way of explaining this text.

CHAPTER XIII

PLYMOUTH GROVE, MANCHESTER

(1849–1852)

REMOVAL from Rumford Street to Plymouth Grove—84, Plymouth Grove—The Novelist's Many-sided Character—First Meeting of Mrs. Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë—Briery Close, Windermere—Charlotte Brontë's First Visit to Plymouth Grove—Mrs. Gaskell's Connection with *Household Words—Lizzie Leigh—A Moorland Cottage—Well of Pen Morfa—The Heart of John Middleton*—Mrs. Bridell-Fox—Influence of Charles Dickens—Mrs. Gaskell's Humour —*Mr. Harrison's Confessions—Disappearances—The Old Nurse's Story—The Schah's English Gardener.*

"OH! for a larger house!" was Mrs. Gaskell's cry when her family grew to four at 121, Rumford Street. The difficulty was to get a house convenient for the family within the range of their limited income. The houses available were either too large or too small, but there was a large detached house in Plymouth Grove, at a yearly rental of £160, that Mrs. Gaskell particularly liked, although it was much too large, or, rather, the rent was above their then means. But after carefully weighing the "pros" and "cons," Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell decided to take what was then 42, Plymouth Grove. The name Grove was quite appropriate in those days, for there were plenty of fine trees in which the many birds of the district found a home, and the fields around gave the place a rural aspect. There are old men in Manchester to-day who remember shooting snipe in the district.

Plymouth Grove is now a busy thoroughfare, with trams running to and fro, though there are still some

84 PLYMOUTH GROVE

of the old trees left in Mrs. Gaskell's front garden which form a leafy screen in summer. The novelist had qualms of conscience about taking so large a house. "It would ruin them," she declared, but there seemed nothing to suit the needs of the family so well, and she had long wished for a detached house with a garden; moreover, the legacies received from Mrs. Lumb in 1837 and from her aunt, Miss Abigail Holland, in 1848, formed a welcome addition to the family income. Added to this was the hundred pounds which she had received in 1848 for *Mary Barton*, together with the proceeds of her three short stories published in *Howitt's Journal* during 1847-8, and the prospect of her earnings from future literary work. Her success gave her faith in her own powers, and she shouldered the burden of a larger house with her characteristic optimism.

The house in Plymouth Grove stands at the corner of Swinton Grove (probably named after Mrs. Gaskell's maternal grandmother). This residence, with its many memories, has now become quite historic, and is known not only as a Gaskell shrine, but also as the house in which Charlotte Brontë stayed on three separate occasions, in 1851, 1853, and in May 1854, shortly before her marriage. The house is said to have been built about the beginning of the nineteenth century, by a rich and eccentric old bachelor, who was partly paralysed, but who was able to find employment and amusement in designing and building houses in the suburbs of Manchester. The interior is unique and ingenious, one room leading into another. This had an attraction for the novelist, for she ever liked things out of the common, and deplored the monotonous rows of houses exactly alike inside and out, which sprung up later in this suburb. The dining-room, which was used as the family sitting-room, has no

fewer than three doors, all leading to different parts of the house. The peculiarities of the interior make the house more convenient and comfortable. This residence probably reminded Mrs. Gaskell of Avonbank, at Stratford-on-Avon, where the rooms led from one to the other. The exterior of the building shows a two-storied square house, with an old-fashioned hospitable portico in front, approached by a short carriage drive. Behind is a small garden and conservatory. At the opposite corner of Swinton Grove is a plot of ground now known as the Gaskell Recreation Ground, which was bought by the Manchester Corporation in 1900, Mrs. Gaskell's daughters contributing £500. An old house, which was afterwards demolished, formerly stood there, the plot with the garden behind forming a public playground for the children around Plymouth Grove, besides protecting the light on the best side of what is now known as No. 84. In addition to the garden, which is not very large, Mrs. Gaskell rented a field, "and set up her cow," like Miss Betty Barker, of *Cranford* fame, besides keeping poultry and pigs and cultivating a vegetable garden. More than one writer has made the mistake of picturing Mrs. Gaskell's small flower garden as a veritable farmyard, where she kept her cows, pigs, and poultry. This home at Plymouth Grove was modelled on Mrs. Lumb's at Knutsford, and in the acquisition of it Mrs. Gaskell got her heart's desire for a real country home, though it was near to smoky Manchester.

This change of residence, though meaning more work and more responsibility, gave great pleasure to Mrs. Gaskell, and it is said she was prouder of her pigs and poultry, cows and vegetables, than of her literary success. She was always most practical, and the work of a small farm was quite familiar to her.

She rejoiced in keeping a good table, with the best of food, well cooked and nicely served. "'Many a one has been comforted in their sorrow by seeing a good dish come upon the table,'" said Martha, when trying to think of some practical way of helping Miss Matty.

In taking this larger house, Mrs. Gaskell was able to use her splendid powers of organisation. She was never afraid of hard work, and was capable of turning her hand to anything, and whatever she did was done thoroughly.

The family now consisted of four girls, Marianne, Meta, Florence, and Julia. The eldest was a thoughtful girl of fifteen, and the youngest a pretty child of three—the pet of the home. From 1849 Mrs. Gaskell led the dual life of a model housewife and busy novelist, and yet she managed, by means of keeping strictly to a daily routine, to plan out her work so that she had leisure to help others. During her sixteen years at Plymouth Grove, she showed her great resourcefulness, and with her unflagging industry and womanly tact, she accomplished much beyond what was expected of her. Truly she was a woman who could play many parts, and, in addition to her many household duties and her writing, she found time to instruct her servants and the girls of her Sunday School class in literature, geography, and other subjects, in addition to superintending the education of her daughters. In times of distress she was the guide of the Manchester Ladies' Committees, as during the "cotton panic" of 1862. At another time she was busy organising a cheap but pure milk supply for the poor, and arranging sewing classes in her own home to find work for the poor women. When on holiday she was the gayest of the gay, entering into the plans for enjoyment like a schoolgirl, and always keen on having "a good time." The mysteries and delights

of the "still-room" were known to her, and she was a clever amateur doctor, and a most competent nurse. In the society of Manchester, London, Paris, or elsewhere, she was the brilliant conversationalist, the attentive listener—or the modest adviser; she could always rise to the occasion and adapt herself to any circumstances, being equally at home with the Lancashire factory girls or the ladies of Queen Victoria's Court. During these early days at Plymouth Grove, her life was extremely busy. It is not surprising that she did not live to old age, but if life is counted by heart-throbs, hers was long indeed, though its years were few.

In the year 1851 Mrs. Gaskell had her portrait drawn by Richmond, and the picture has ever since been one of the chief ornaments of the drawing-room at Plymouth Grove.

Among literary friendships few are so interesting as the brief seven years of mutual esteem, which ripened into affectionate intimacy, between two women so different in disposition and outlook as Mrs. Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë. The first meeting of the two is now an old story. Mrs. Gaskell was six years older than Charlotte Brontë, and her life had been more varied, with a much wider experience. A wife and a mother, she had been kept from being what Charlotte Brontë in her later years could not help being—self-centred. It is to the credit of Mrs. Gaskell that she took the first steps in their interesting friendship by writing to her contemporary to congratulate her on *Shirley* in November, 1849.

"To know Mrs. Gaskell was to love her," said one of her Manchester friends, and Charlotte Brontë, though proverbially shy and unbending to strangers, at once succumbed to Mrs. Gaskell's winning personality. "She is a good, she is a great woman. In

Mrs. Gaskell's nature, it mournfully pleases me to fancy a remote affinity to my sister Emily," wrote Charlotte Brontë to Mr. W. S. Williams on November 20th, 1849. The affinity to her best beloved sister was of itself sufficient to form a bond between these two women. That first letter was the prelude to many others, and its contents are more or less revealed by Charlotte Brontë's reply.

Mrs. Gaskell's letter was characteristic of the writer's kind and sympathetic disposition. One of her friends writes of her talents for "admiring rightly," and this was exercised to the full in her letter of congratulation to Charlotte Brontë. It was in November, 1849, that Mrs. Gaskell first wrote to Charlotte Brontë, but they did not meet until the following August. The place of meeting was Briery Close, on the shores of Lake Windermere. It was then the residence of Sir James and Lady Kay-Shuttleworth. Sir James was a great admirer of the author of *Jane Eyre*, and she and Mrs. Gaskell were invited to spend a few days at his pretty country residence. The house is still there, though it has been somewhat altered since the days when Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth delighted in entertaining the literary people of the day. The house has been enlarged, and the drawing-room and library have been thrown into one, but the magnificent view from the house is much the same as it was when Mrs. Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë stayed there. Mrs. Gaskell wrote a long letter to a friend describing this meeting: "Dark when I got to Windermere station; a drive along the level road to Low-wood; then a stoppage at a pretty house, and then a pretty drawing-room, in which were Sir James and Lady Kay-Shuttleworth, and a little lady in a black silk gown, whom I could not see at first for the dazzle in the room; she came up and shook hands with me at once. I went up to

unbonnet, etc.; came down to tea; the little lady worked away and hardly spoke, but I had time for a good look at her. She is (as she calls herself) *undeveloped*, thin, and more than half a head shorter than I am; soft brown hair, not very dark; eyes (very good and expressive, looking straight and open at you) of the same colour as her hair; a large mouth; the forehead square, broad, and rather overhanging. She has a very sweet voice, rather hesitates in choosing her expressions, but, when chosen, they seem without an effort admirable, and just befitting the occasion; there is nothing overstrained, but perfectly simple. . . . After breakfast, we four went out on the lake, and Miss Brontë agreed with me in liking Mr. Newman's *Soul*, and in liking *Modern Painters* and the idea of the *Seven Lamps;* and she told me about Father Newman's lectures at the Oratory in a very quiet, concise, graphic way. . . . She is more like Miss—— than any one in her ways—if you can fancy Miss —— to have gone through suffering enough to have taken out every spark of merriment, and to be shy and silent from the habit of extreme, intense solitude. Such a life as Miss Brontë's I never heard of before. —— described her home to me as in a village of grey stone houses, perched up on the north side of a bleak moor, looking over sweeps of bleak moors, etc., etc.

"We were only three days together, the greater part of which was spent in driving about, in order to show Miss Brontë the Westmoreland scenery, as she had never been there before. We were both included in an invitation to drink tea quietly at Fox How; and I then saw how severely her nerves were taxed by the effort of going among strangers. We knew beforehand that the number of the party would not exceed twelve; but she suffered the whole day from

BRIERY CLOSE, WINDERMERE, 1850

an acute headache brought on by apprehension of the evening.

"Briery Close was situated high above Low-wood, and, of course, commanded an extensive view and wide horizon. I was struck by Miss Brontë's careful examination of the shape of the clouds and the signs of the heavens, in which she read, as from a book, what the coming weather would be. I told her that I saw she must have a view equal in extent at her own home. She said that I was right, but that the character of the prospect from Haworth was very different; that I had no idea what a companion the sky became to anyone living in solitude—more than any inanimate object on earth—more than the moors themselves."

Miss Brontë's first impression of Mrs. Gaskell from her letter was the same as when she met her face to face: "She is a woman of the most genuine talent, of cheerful, pleasing, and cordial manners, and I believe of a good, kind heart." This brief three days' holiday at Briery Close was the beginning of a friendship which was to ripen with time, especially on the part of Mrs. Gaskell, who was wont to speak of her friend as "poor Miss Brontë" after she knew of her sad and solitary life at Haworth. Mrs. Gaskell was impulsive and eager to foster the friendship, but Charlotte Brontë was at first rather reticent, and, judging from the letters, she seems to have sometimes felt not quite at home with Mrs. Gaskell, although she came nearer to unburdening her heart to her than to any other friend of her later days. She was always troubled by the fear of overestimating the regard which her friends had for her. In June, 1851, Charlotte Brontë visited Mrs. Gaskell in her own home at Plymouth Grove, Manchester. She entered this home, so long known for its hospitality to many

who cherish happy memories of bygone days, for the first time, on her way from London to Haworth on June 27, 1851.

"The visit formed a cheering break in the journey," writes Charlotte to her life-long friend, Ellen Nussey. A story which lingers among the memories of the drawing-room at Plymouth Grove is associated with Miss Brontë's first visit. She was asked by Mrs. Gaskell if she preferred tea or coffee. "Tea," was the reply; "but please see that there is no green tea mixed with it, as I am never able to sleep after partaking of a cup of tea that contains the least particle of green leaf." Mrs. Gaskell praised green tea, saying that she thought a mixture of green and black blended well and made the beverage stimulating; but Miss Brontë objected. Mrs. Gaskell knew that the tea she used was a mixture of green and black. It was impossible to obtain any other at that time of the evening, as Plymouth Grove was some distance from any shops in those days, and so the tea was made as usual without the guest knowing that it contained green. The next morning Miss Brontë was asked how she had slept. "Splendidly," was the reply, and a smile went round the breakfast table. Miss Brontë continued to drink tea with a mixture of green in it whilst she was Mrs. Gaskell's guest. It was after Miss Brontë's first visit to Plymouth Grove that Mrs. Gaskell wrote *Cranford*, and the green tea episode finds a place in its pages, though it is related as applying to Miss Matty Jenkyns. "If she was made aware that she had been drinking green tea at any time, she always thought it her duty to lie awake half through the night afterwards (I have known her take it in ignorance many a time without such effects)."

Mrs. Gaskell began a new chapter of her history

when she went to Plymouth Grove, for the taking of a larger house synchronised with her *début* into the ranks of regular journalism. Previously she had worked at irregular intervals, sending a story just when she had one ready. It was at this time that Charles Dickens wrote a generous and charming letter asking for Mrs. Gaskell's help with the new magazine which he was about to start. This was *Household Words*—the first number of which was issued in March, 1850.

"I do not know," Dickens wrote, "what your views of temperance or abstinence may be, but as I do honestly know there is no living English writer whose aid I would desire to enlist in preference to the authoress of *Mary Barton* (a book which most profoundly affected and impressed me), I venture to ask you whether you can give me any hope that you will write a short tale, or a number of tales, for the projected pages. I would set a value on your help, which your modesty can hardly imagine, and I am perfectly sure that the least result of your reflection or observation in respect of the life around you would attract attention and do good. My unaffected and great admiration of your books makes me very earnest in all relating to you."

Mrs. Gaskell was very willing to comply with Dickens' request, and she was particularly glad to know that her articles and stories were to appear unsigned. "Every paper will be published without signature," wrote Dickens. This meant much to a new writer, for it gave her a free hand, so that she wrote with confidence and modest assurance. It often amused her to hear her own stories criticised, and she never lost an opportunity in those early days of hearing what "her bugbear, the public"—to quote her own words—thought of them.

Commenting on the launch of *Household Words*, Forster says, in his *Life of Dickens:* "The first number appeared on Saturday, the 30th of March, 1850, and contained, among other things, the beginning of a story by a very original writer, Mrs. Gaskell, for whose powers he [Charles Dickens] had a high admiration, and with whom he had friendly intercourse during many years." In his eagerness to secure Mrs. Gaskell's help, Dickens wrote: "I should be very glad, indeed, to come to Manchester to explain anything you might wish to know"; but it is not recorded that he paid a visit to Plymouth Grove at this time. The probability is that he did not.

The first story that Mrs. Gaskell sent for publication in *Household Words* was *Lizzie Leigh*, and it is thought that at least part of it had been written previous to this time and even before *Mary Barton*. As *Mary Barton* had been such a conspicuous success, the novelist had no hesitation in sending a Lancashire story as her first contribution. The plot of the story is in some respects similar to that of *Ruth*. It tells of a young girl's betrayal, and pleads for kindness and mercy to the erring one. It is certain that Mrs. Gaskell had known of cases similar in some respects to those of Lizzie Leigh and Ruth, and in her writing she tries to show the pitiful side of their downfall. As a mother, she realised the awful suffering caused to the girl, and in *Lizzie Leigh* she shows the agony of the mother, made all the more unbearable by the father's refusal to forgive his daughter until he is on his death-bed. The story opens with a death-bed scene, and, like *Mary Barton*, tells of the troubles of the humble classes in Lancashire. The love of her mother for her erring daughter, and, later on, her intercession for her son, are drawn as only a mother could draw them. "'Lizzie, lass, don't

hide thy head so ; it's thy mother as is speaking to thee. Thy little child clung to me only yesterday ; and if it's gone to be an angel, it will speak to God for thee.'" Mrs. Gaskell always advocated the redeeming influence of a little child, and her heart went out to the poor outcasts of society.

" One can hardly live and labour, and plan and make sacrifices for any human creature without learning to love it," was the novelist's comment, when Miss Galindo took upon herself the burden of supporting little Bessy, the illegitimate child of her former lover.

Although my Lady Ludlow could not bear the mention of illegitimate children, yet, later, Bessy, who belonged to that unfortunate class, marries the clergyman, and Lady Ludlow invites them to her select party. Mrs. Gaskell brings out the merciful side of human nature, and pleads that an innocent child should not be made to suffer by wearing the mark of the dishonour of its parents, but should be given a fair chance in the race of life. *Lizzie Leigh* appeared in the first six numbers of *Household Words*. Mrs. Gaskell also set to work to write a small Christmas book at the request of Mr. Chapman, of Messrs. Chapman & Hall. Charlotte Brontë was anxious that her publishers (Smith, Elder & Co.) should publish it, but the book had already been promised.

A Moorland Cottage is a simple, quiet story, which revealed the serious, blended with the humorous side of human nature. The little descriptive touches reproduce one of her holiday haunts as it was sixty years ago. The book was illustrated by Birket Foster, and Mrs. Gaskell sent a copy of this simple country story, as a Christmas present, in December, 1850, to Charlotte Brontë, who returned the compliment by asking her publishers to forward to Mrs.

Gaskell a copy of *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë. Charlotte Brontë quotes: "Your leal-hearted little Maggie" (the heroine in *A Moorland Cottage*) in one of her letters to Mrs. Gaskell; and at another time she says of the story: "It opens like a morning daisy and finishes like a herb—a balsamic herb with healing in its wings."

In addition to *Lizzie Leigh* and *A Moorland Cottage*, the novelist published the *Well of Pen Morfa*, a Welsh story, in two numbers of *Household Words* for November. This is evidently a story founded on facts gleaned from a Welsh holiday. It is not very well told, and the author gives too much rein to her feelings for the heroine, which makes rather sentimental reading. The December number of *Household Words* contained a Lancashire story, *The Heart of John Middleton*. The scene is laid around Pendle Hill, and the novelist gives a clue to the district by her allusions to "the row of houses where Mr. Peel came to live for the sake of the water power." The river Bibble is the novelist's name for the real river Ribble.

In the characters John and Nelly, Mrs. Gaskell shows her splendid intuitive power of seeing the best in everyone and in most unlikely characters. This tale of Lancashire life is set in one of the places whose history was familiar to Mrs. Gaskell:

"'We in Lancashire speak a rough kind of Bible language, and the texts seemed very clear to me,'" says John Middleton, but this is probably a reminiscence of Mrs. Gaskell's own chats with the Sunday School girls. The scene where Nelly shields John from the attack of his rival is very similar to the scene in *North and South*, where Margaret Hale protects John Thornton. "'She clung round me as a shield, making her sweet body into a defence for mine.'" There is a sly hint to the society of the religious, which compares

badly with that of the world: "'I knew where the gang met, and I knew what a welcome back I should have—a far warmer and more hearty welcome than good men had given me when I tried to enter their ranks.'" Mrs. Gaskell often deplored the apathy of the members of the churches and the religious societies towards strangers, and to those who were anxious to turn over a new leaf; and she never lost an opportunity of showing her own eagerness to help those who had fallen and repented, irrespective of their creed or station in life. It was her broad-mindedness which made her popular wherever she went. In this short Lancashire story are distinct traces of Mrs. Gaskell's chats with Charlotte Brontë, which took place in the meeting at Briery Close in the previous August. In her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Mrs. Gaskell tells of the Yorkshire proverb—which Charlotte Brontë mentions—"Keep a stone in thy pocket for seven years, turn it, and keep it seven years more; but have it ready to cast at thy enemy when the time comes." The novelist uses this as a Lancashire proverb in *The Heart of John Middleton*. The conclusion of the story goes to prove what Mrs. Gaskell always affirmed, that it is better to be sinned against than sinning. "'In the storm of the night mine enemy came to me; in the calm of the grey morning I led him forth and bade him God-speed. A woe had come upon me, but the burning burden of a sinful, angry heart was taken off.'" Mrs. Bridell-Fox, a daughter of W. J. Fox, once a noted Unitarian minister, and afterwards a member of Parliament for Oldham, and a friend of the Gaskells, mentions in some graphic memories, having walked with Mrs. Gaskell until long past midnight over the Fells, which divide Lancashire and Yorkshire, "where the wild winds came down and whistled round the cottage of John Middleton, till his

hard heart was melted within him by the death of his sweet invalid wife." This reference goes to prove that most of Mrs. Gaskell's stories were founded on fact. Though not written in a didactic style, this story, like many of the novelist's, points " the better way," and thus satisfied Mrs. Gaskell's wish to do good by her writing.

This year of 1850, then, was memorable as giving Mrs. Gaskell not only a recognised place in journalism, as previously mentioned, but also an opportunity of meeting Charlotte Brontë at Briery Close, Windermere. Already she had met Charles Dickens, and it was with these two novelists who influenced her most in her literary career, that she became most familiar. With Thackeray she was never quite at ease, though she became the valued friend of his daughters after his death in 1863. The influence of Charlotte Brontë and Dickens never went to the length of making Mrs. Gaskell a mere copyist. In her first paper on *Cranford*, published in 1851, she introduced the work of the editor in very eulogistic terms, which Dickens quickly suppressed, without asking the novelist's permission.

" 'Have you seen any numbers of the *Pickwick Papers?* Aren't they famously good?' " says Captain Brown to Miss Deborah Jenkyns. This was obviously a much too pointed reference for the editor of *Household Words*, and he quickly substituted: " 'Have you seen any numbers of '*Hood's Own*?' " In several other complimentary references to the characters of " Boz," Dickens substituted the name of Hood. Mrs. Gaskell, like Dickens, mixed the real and fictitious, and it is this combination that often gives away her characters and makes it easily possible to identify them, though other writers were more careful about using the actual names both of places

or persons. Mrs. Gaskell keenly resented any alteration in her manuscript, and wrote off in great haste to Dickens demanding the withdrawal of her sketch, but it was too late, for Dickens was so pleased with this first *Cranford* paper, that he sent it off to the printers at once for insertion in the very next issue of *Household Words*. In his modest letter of apology, he says: "Any recollection of me from your pen cannot (as I think you know) be otherwise than truly gratifying to me, but with my name on every page of *Household Words*, there would be—or at least I should feel—an impropriety in so mentioning myself. I hope and trust that the substitution will not be any serious drawback to the paper in any eyes but yours." Charles Dickens took care not to repay the compliment by praising a woman writer. On the contrary, he took what might seem like revenge, for he offended the lady novelists of his day by his sketch of Mrs. Jellyby, and has been accused of lowering the *status* of succeeding women writers by his caricatures of an authoress. Evidently the well-known women writers of the day—Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell, Harriet Martineau, and George Eliot—did not deserve to be satirised as Mrs. Jellyby, for they were all neat, tidy, and methodical, and knew how to manage a home as well as write a novel. It is usual to pair off Mrs. Gaskell with Dickens, as being in a sense affinities, just as the names of Charlotte Brontë and Thackeray are often quoted together; but there is no record of Mrs. Gaskell ever acknowledging her indebtedness to Dickens as Charlotte Brontë acknowledged hers to Thackeray, though it is certain that Dickens, and in a less degree Thackeray, had a part in awakening Mrs. Gaskell's inimitable humour, which produced *Cranford*. The serio-comic touch used by Dickens and Thackeray appealed to her in dealing with ordinary

characters, and she was fortunate in the reminiscences of her own life—scenes and characters, which lent themselves so easily to her own kindly vein of humour—the vein of *Cranford*—which stands alone in its winsomeness and tender pathos.

Cranford inaugurated what was in many respects a new style of humorous literature. Dickens and Thackeray had whetted the appetite for a more hilarious humour, and their caricatures were often productive of roars of laughter. The time hardly seemed opportune for a quieter tone of mirth to introduce itself, yet how well it appealed to the refined and best side of human nature the reception of *Cranford* proved. Mrs. Gaskell, with her well-known talent for mimicry, might easily have copied her contemporaries, and instead of the kindly characters so beautifully revealed in *Cranford*, she might have given us something which would have added to the school of snobs. But she was always above being a mere copyist, and with splendid fidelity she kept to her own course, and delighted readers the world over with her little sketches, which were, as compared with Dickens and Thackeray, as well finished little water-colour paintings, beside the strong, bold canvas of a Rubens or a Vandyke. Instead of uproarious mirth, Mrs. Gaskell provokes the kindly, benevolent smile, which seldom broadens into laughter, but which always leaves the reader better for its kindly influence. Mrs. Gaskell kept the curb on her talent for caricature, and she was careful to avoid exaggeration. In a letter to Ruskin, she tells a true story of a new carpet bought by two of her Cranford friends. The maid was instructed to hop from one part to another when entering the room to avoid placing her feet on the white spots in the pattern of the carpet. The novelist might have found a place

for this in her *Cranford* sketches, but she refrained for fear it would be considered too far-fetched. Other writers, both British and American, have tried to copy the style of *Cranford*, but not one has quite succeeded in showing just the sunny, quaint humour that peeps out of the pages of Mrs. Gaskell's humorous stories.

Besides publishing the three stories in *Household Words* and writing a Christmas story, Mrs. Gaskell collected her three stories which had appeared in *Howitt's Journal* in 1847–1848, and published them in one book, under the title of *Tales of Manchester Life*. She also reprinted *A Sexton's Hero* and *Christmas Storms and Sunshine* as a little booklet, which she gave as a contribution to a summer *fête* held at Capesthorne, which an intimate friend of Mrs. Gaskell's had organised to raise money for the building of new baths and wash-houses in Macclesfield. An original copy of this booklet is to be seen in the Moss Side Free Library, to which it was presented a few years ago by Mrs. Gaskell's daughters.

In the following year, Mrs. Gaskell wrote *Mr. Harrison's Confessions*, which, strange to say, she did not publish in *Household Words*, although Dickens was always anxious to receive contributions from her pen. Elaborated on the same scale as *Cranford*, this first sketch of Knutsford life might have achieved the popularity won by the latter masterpiece.

Mr. Harrison's Confessions is a story cast in a much lighter vein than any previous tale from Mrs. Gaskell's pen. It is full of humour, and shows an abundant knowledge of the weaker side of human nature. It was first published in a magazine called *The Ladies' Companion* in the early part of 1851, and was afterwards issued by Messrs. Chapman & Hall with *Lizzie Leigh and other Tales*, in 1855. Duncombe is

evidently Knutsford, which afterwards appears as Cranford in Mrs. Gaskell's most popular story.

Mr. Harrison's Confessions is the prelude to *Cranford*, and is the novelist's first story in which Knutsford figures. The same streets and houses as are to be found in *Cranford* later are used in this sketch. As a story, it is more logical than *Cranford*, and it is kept to a few people, who all take their place in due course. Mrs. Rose is excellently drawn. She is surely cousin to Mrs. Gibson, though not quite so clever. Sophy belongs to the same type of character as Molly Gibson, and has the same sterling qualities. Dr. Morgan may have been based on Dr. Peter Colthurst, the novelist's great uncle, or on Dr. Peter Holland, who appears in other stories. The story is relieved by the droll humour of the assistant-surgeon from Guy's, and betrays Mrs. Gaskell's acquaintance with the doings of the medical students of a past generation. It is probable that her cousin, Sir Henry Holland, supplied her with the information which enabled her to give the conventional representation of a past type of medical student in Jack Marshland, as Sir Henry had been a medical student at Guy's Hospital.

Mr. Harrison, having qualified as a surgeon at Guy's Hospital, is offered an appointment as colleague to an old bachelor doctor, Mr. Morgan, whose practice is confined to the sleepy old town of Duncombe and its immediate neighbourhood. Mr. Morgan is described as "a dapper little man, very punctilious about dress, and especially anxious that his young colleague should create a favourable impression, and should make no false step at the commencement of his work at Duncombe."

"'Excuse me, my dear young friend, but may I ask if you have no other coat besides that—"cut-away," I believe you call them? We are rather sticklers for

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propriety, I believe, in Duncombe ; and much depends on a first impression. Let it be professional, my dear sir. Black is the garb of our profession. Forgive me speaking so plainly ; but I consider myself *in loco parentis.*'"

Instead of living with the old bachelor as he expected to do, Mr. Harrison finds that he is to lodge with an old lady, the widow of a former doctor, and then he realises the truth of Mr. Morgan's description of the place.

"'You will find it a curious statistical fact, but five-sixths of our householders of a certain rank in Duncombe are women. We have widows and old maids in rich abundance. In fact, my dear sir, I believe that you and I are almost the only gentlemen in the place —Mr. Bullock, of course, excepted. By gentlemen, I mean professional men. It behoves us to remember, sir, that so many of the female sex rely upon us for the kindness and protection which every man who is worthy of the name is always so happy to render.'" This story was written before *Cranford*, and some of the facts are identical but differently expressed. Mr. Harrison soon finds out that he is the centre of a new interest in the place. He has only been a short time in his temporary apartments, when the young maid-servant taps at the door :

"'Please, sir, the Miss Tomkinsons' compliments, and they would be glad to know how you feel yourself after your journey.'" Four or five such messages are brought to him in quick succession. "'I really wished I were not so ruddy-looking. I was afraid I should disappoint the tender-hearted town when they saw what a hale young fellow I was.'"

Mr. Harrison, in trying to carry out his senior's instructions, finds himself in serious difficulties. As a consequence of following his advice, he manages to

convey the impression that he is intending to make a proposal of marriage to three different ladies, whilst he actually falls in love with a fourth, the Vicar's daughter. The practice appears to be in a fair way of being ruined by the village gossips, and matters are not improved by the unexpected visit of a fellow medical student—a rough, rollicking fellow, who relates at a little Duncombe supper party some of the escapades in which Mr. Harrison figured when in London. The tension at the climax is relieved by a series of weddings. The senior partner marries Mrs. Rose, the housekeeper. Miss Caroline Tomkinson elopes with the son of a local tradesman, and the lawyer's daughter, Miss Bullock, whose stepmother has tried so hard to bring about her marriage with the young doctor, in order to be rid of her, takes a sensible view of the matter, and confesses that she had had no wish or expectation of marrying Mr. Harrison, who afterwards marries Sophy, the Vicar's daughter.

The story contains some choice descriptions of country scenery, showing that Mrs. Gaskell must have been a keen observer of nature :

" The road to the old hall was along a sandy lane, with high hedge-banks ; the wych-elms almost met overhead. . . . The trees were gorgeous in their orange and crimson hues, varied by dark green holly bushes glistening in the autumn sun.

" I should have thought the colours too vivid, if I had seen them in a picture, especially when we wound up the brow, after crossing the little bridge over the brook . . . and I caught the purple hills beyond. We could see the old hall, too, from that point, with its warm, rich woods billowing up behind, and the blue waters of the moat lying still under the sunlight." This refers to Tabley Hall, on the outskirts of Knutsford.

One of the most amusing scenes in the story is where the young surgeon examines Miss Caroline Tomkinson's heart.

"'Miss Caroline always received me, and kept me talking in her washed-out style, after I had seen my patient. One day she told me she thought she had a weakness about the heart, and would be glad if I would bring my stethoscope the next time, which I accordingly did; and, while I was on my knees listening to the pulsations, one of the young ladies came in. She said:

"'Oh dear! I never! I beg your pardon, ma'am,' and scuttled out. There was not much the matter with Miss Caroline's heart: a little feeble in action or so, a mere matter of weakness and general languor. When I went down I saw two or three of the girls peeping out of the half-closed schoolroom door, but they shut it immediately, and I heard them laughing."

The most pathetic scene in the story is that recording the death of little Walter, the Vicar's son, who was a general favourite. Again we are reminded of the death of Mrs. Gaskell's own little boy: "The street was as quiet as ever; not a shadow was changed; for it was not yet four o'clock. But during that night a soul had departed."

In the June number of *Household Words* for 1851 is to be found a curious paper on *Disappearances*. The subject was most probably suggested by the disappearance at sea of the novelist's only brother, which is mentioned so often in her stories. This sad event of her life, like the loss of her son, never seems to be long absent from her thoughts. This article also goes to prove once more the novelist's interest in anything mysterious and her natural love of story-telling. In her young days at Knutsford there was plenty of time for this innocent amusement, and when newspapers

and magazines were few, the traditional stories from the older members of the family took their place. It was in December of this year that the first of the sketches for *Cranford* appeared, and they continued at certain intervals until May, 1853, much to the delight of Dickens, who supplied the titles. In one of his letters to Mrs. Gaskell he writes : " If you were not the most suspicious of women, always looking for soft sawder in the purest metal of praise, I should call your paper delightful." The year 1852 found the novelist busy with her regular contributions to *Household Words*, and, in addition, she wrote *The Old Nurse's Story* for the special Christmas number. It is one of the novelist's ghost stories, of which she possessed a goodly store, and its writing grips the reader to the end. Then came the *Schah's English Gardener*, the facts of which Mrs. Gaskell vouches for as they were communicated to her by the gardener to one of her friends of Teddesley Park, in Staffordshire. Mrs. Gaskell says she took notes at the time, and her information is retold in a lucid and interesting manner, which proves how thoroughly she questioned her informant. In 1852 this paper would have been useful to any traveller intending to visit Persia, though the account of the life as given is not attractive. Mrs. Gaskell seemed to be ever on the look-out for information, and the fact that Mr. Burton had been out to the Far East as a gardener sufficed to put her on the scent for a story.

CHAPTER XIV

PLYMOUTH GROVE

(1852–1856)

A Holiday at Keswick—Visit of Charles Dickens to Manchester—*Ruth* and *Villette*—Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot—*Traits and Stories of the Huguenots*—Madame Mohl—*My French Master*—*The Squire's Story*—Charlotte Brontë's Second Visit to Plymouth Grove—Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe—Mrs. Gaskell's Visit to Haworth—Correspondence between Charlotte Brontë and Mrs. Gaskell—Stories of Manchester Life—Mr. Gaskell's Lectures on the Lancashire Dialect—Marriage of Charlotte Brontë—Charlotte Brontë's Third and last Visit to Plymouth Grove—Mrs. Gaskell's Invitation to Haworth—*Modern Greek Songs*—*Company Manners*—*North and South*—*Lizzie Leigh and other Tales*—*An Accursed Race*—*Half a Lifetime Ago*—*The Poor Clare*—Death of Charlotte Brontë—Mrs. Gaskell's Preparation for Writing the Life—Life of Charlotte Brontë—De Quincey and the Brontës.

In the summer of 1852 Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell, with their four daughters, spent a holiday near Keswick, and the following January there appeared in *Household Words* an interesting account of a visit on a hot July day to one of the farms on the high fells near Derwentwater. The article, which is entitled *Cumberland Sheep-shearers*, is written in the first person, and gives not only a graphic description of the sheep-shearing, but also a chatty account of the five-mile walk up-hill all the way: "When our breath failed us during that steep ascent, we had one invariable dodge by which we hoped to escape this 'fat and scant of breath' quotation; we turned round and admired the lovely views, which from each succeeding elevation became more and more beautiful." By the help of

Mrs. Gaskell's keen observation, the reader is taken through "the state apartment" of this farm-house, "where the children make their first appearance, and where the heads of the household lie down to die if the Great Conqueror gives them sufficient warning for such decent and composed submission as is best in accordance with the simple dignity of their lives. . . . "Little bits of rosemary and lavender were strewed about the room; partly, as I afterwards learnt, to prevent incautious feet from slipping about on the polished oak floor." Nothing ever seemed to escape the novelist, and she always seemed to find out "the why and wherefore" of any strange customs. The visit is admirably described, and the interest is kept up to the very end. The polished pewter on the dresser and the master's cupboard are there. "Do you know what a master's cupboard is? Mr. Wordsworth could have told you, ay! and have shown you one at Rydal Mount, too." The account of the high tea, with sweet butter and clap bread, is interesting, and serves Mrs. Gaskell for later information. Like a true relative of *My Lady Ludlow*, the novelist tells of sparing the feelings of her hostess by eating the nauseous compound of sweet butter herself rather than letting her children leave it untouched. It is a real little word-picture, with all the elements beautifully blended. "There were all the classical elements for the representation of life; there were 'old men and maidens, young men and children' of the Psalmist; there were all the stages and conditions of being that sing forth their farewell to the departing crusaders in the 'Saint's Tragedy.'" Mrs. Gaskell had an eye for young lovers, and innocent match-making was one of her accomplishments. The pretty coquetry between Isabel, the handsome daughter of the farmer, and Tom, "the best sheep-shearer of last year," is told with a

relish, and Mrs. Gaskell does not hesitate to bring in her own happy courting days: "We—experienced spectators—could see the end of all this coyness and blushing as well as if we were in church at the wedding." The account of this sheep-shearing roused much interest among the readers of *Household Words*, and John Forster was much puzzled to know who had written this delightful story, until Dickens, in response to his request, supplied him with the name of the author.

In September, 1852, Charles Dickens was in Manchester filling the *rôle* of a theatrical manager and actor at the Free Trade Hall. He took the part of "Sir Charles Coldstream," and with him were Wilkie Collins, Mark Lemon, and others, acting in *Used Up*, a comedy in two acts. The company called themselves "The Amateur Company of the Guild of Literature and Art," and Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were much interested in having Dickens amongst them at that time and at the Guild dinner. Dickens made a characteristic speech, which revealed the tender, serious side of his nature. In addition to her short stories, Mrs. Gaskell was working hard at *Ruth*, and under the date of April 12th, 1852, writes: "I had given Miss Brontë, in one of my letters, an outline of the story on which I was then engaged." In reply, she gets the following letter from Charlotte Brontë:

"The sketch you give me of your work (respecting which I am, of course, dumb) seems to me very noble; and its purpose may be as useful in practical result as it is high and just in theoretical tendency. Such a book may restore hope and energy to many who thought they had forfeited their right to both; and open a clear course for honourable effort to some who deemed that they and all honour had parted company in this world. Yet—hear my protest! Why

should she die? Why are we to shut up the book weeping?

"My heart fails me already at the thought of the pang it will have to undergo. And yet you must follow the impulse of your own inspiration. If *that* commands the slaying of the victim, no bystander has a right to put out his hand to stay the sacrificial knife; but I hold you a stern priestess in these matters."

To those who have compared Charlotte Brontë and Mrs. Gaskell as novelists, this letter confirms the opinion that Miss Brontë, although six years younger, was the greater writer; and for the proofs of such a book as *Ruth* to be sent to her shows Mrs. Gaskell's appreciation of the genius of her friend, though it does not follow that Mrs. Gaskell ever altered any of her work to suit Charlotte Brontë's criticism, for, in spite of her critic's protest, "Why should she die?" the reader does "shut up the book weeping"; but Mrs. Gaskell was eager to know how the story impressed her contemporary. It was very characteristic of the modesty of the author of *Ruth* that, with four daughters of her own, she should seek advice from one much less experienced in worldly affairs.

There is no record that Charlotte Brontë ever sent a line of her own to Mrs. Gaskell for criticism; where Mrs. Gaskell was frank and open, Charlotte Brontë was reserved and independent to a fault; but both women were alike in their indifference to praise, and their fear of writing a line that should do harm or be misunderstood.

Mrs. Gaskell's *Ruth* was ready at the same time as *Villette*. It was to be published by Messrs. Chapman & Hall, whilst *Villette* was to be published by Smith, Elder & Co., in 1853. For some reason, which is not explained, Mrs. Gaskell wrote to Charlotte Brontë,

asking if she would mind arranging with the publishers, with whom Charlotte Brontë was staying at the time, to allow *Ruth* to be announced before *Villette*, as there was a fear of the two novels clashing if they both were issued at exactly the same time. It speaks volumes for the friendship of these two writers, who, in a sense, could hardly help being rivals, that Charlotte Brontë agreed so spontaneously and generously to delay *Villette*.

Of this Mrs. Gaskell says: "It is with a sad, proud pleasure I copy her words of friendship now."

"LONDON, *Jan.* 12*th*, 1853.

"It is with *you* the ball rests. I have not heard from you since I wrote last; but I thought I knew the reason of your silence, viz., application to work—and therefore I accept it, not merely with resignation, but with satisfaction.

"I am now in London, as the date above will show, staying very quietly at my publisher's, and correcting proofs, etc. Before receiving yours, I had felt, and expressed to Mr. Smith, reluctance to come in the way of *Ruth*; not that I think *she* would suffer from contact with *Villette*—we know not but that the damage might be the other way; but I have ever held comparisons to be odious, and would fain that neither I nor my friends should be made subject for the same. Mr. Smith proposes, accordingly, to defer the publication of my book till the 24th inst.; he says that will give *Ruth* the start in the papers daily and weekly, and also will leave free to her all the February magazines. Should this delay appear to you insufficient, speak! and it shall be protracted.

"I dare say, arrange as we may, we shall not be able wholly to prevent comparisons: it is the nature of some critics to be invidious; but we need not care; we can set them at defiance; they *shall* not

make us foes, they *shall* not mingle with our mutual feelings one taint of jealousy; there is my hand on that; I know you will give clasp for clasp. *Villette* has, indeed, no right to push itself before *Ruth*. There is a goodness, a philanthropic purpose, a social use in the latter, to which the former cannot for an instant pretend; nor can it claim precedence on the ground of surpassing power."

Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot were never really intimate, though the former, as the older writer, wrote very kindly to George Eliot in her early days of authorship. When *Scenes from Clerical Life* was published anonymously, there were some who attributed the work to Mrs. Gaskell. Probably the account of Mary Barton and Milly Barton were thought to come from the same pen. George Eliot was not always an able or reliable critic. Of *Ruth* she writes: "Of course, you have read *Ruth* by this time. Its style has a great refreshment to me, from its finish and fullness." She then proceeds to complain of the feeble and false representation of life given by most women novelists of the time. Her criticism of *Ruth* is very severe, and has not proved accurate. "*Ruth*, with all its merits," says she, "will not be an enduring or classical fiction." Whilst criticising what she considers to be Mrs. Gaskell's weakness, she praises her touches of description, and refers for illustration to the account of the attic bedroom in *Ruth*, and concludes by saying, "Mrs. Gaskell has certainly a charming mind, and one cannot help loving her as one reads her books."

George Eliot was inaccurate in her estimate not only of Mrs. Gaskell's work, but also of that of Charles Dickens, whose books she infelicitously declared would be quite meaningless to future generations.

Charles Kingsley wrote a very appreciative letter to

Mrs. Gaskell in praise of *Ruth*, referring to the "beauty and righteousness" of the book, and then going on to say: "English people in general have but one opinion of *Ruth*, and that is, one of utter satisfaction." He concludes: "May God bless you, and help you to write many more such books as you have already written."

In the year 1853 Mrs. Gaskell published *Cranford* in book form, and her new novel, *Ruth*, both of which were successfully launched, and added much to the novelist's reputation. *Cranford* quickly went into a second edition, and it is still being reprinted, more than fifty years after its first publication, in spite of the fact that it has been issued by no less than twelve different publishers, including a French translation, issued in 1856 by Hachette & Co.

Mrs. Gaskell adopted the custom of going away for a holiday on the Continent immediately after dispatching her final proofs to the publishers, "in order to escape the reviews," she said, for she was peculiarly sensitive and dreaded criticism of any kind, never being anxious for praise, and fearing censure, not so much for herself as for the conscientious fear of being misunderstood. As *Ruth* was a problem story, and it elicited much adverse criticism from, amongst others, her Knutsford relatives and friends, Mrs. Gaskell was ill and depressed for some time after its publication, in spite of the fact that more than one able critic admitted that there was more Christianity in it than in whole volumes of orthodox theology.

A visit to France gave Mrs. Gaskell a subject for *Household Words—Traits and Stories of the Huguenots*. It has sometimes been questioned whether Mrs. Gaskell went for her holidays with the view of finding a story, or whether she took a holiday, and with her close observation and love of research found that she must

write something to illustrate her holidays. A perusal of some of her letters proves that her mind was always on the alert, and even if she had not published tales of her holidays, she would have left very pleasant accounts of her rambles in many letters, which only the privileged few have been allowed to see. France and French people had always an attraction for her ; her early associations with her first French master, Monsieur Rogier, had stimulated her interest in modern languages, and, later, her friendship with French families in Manchester and London strengthened this. It was about this time that she first met Madame Mohl at her historic house in the Rue du Bac in Paris, once the home of Madame Récamier, and the house in which Chateaubriand died. Madame Mohl, the wife of Julius Mohl, the German Orientalist, was English by birth, her maiden name being Mary Clarke. She went to live in France when a child, first at a convent school at Toulouse and then with her widowed mother at Paris, and became a capable French scholar, afterwards writing the life of Madame Récamier. Mrs. Gaskell refers to her in one of her stories as " an English friend of mine, who lives in Paris ; English by birth, but married to a German professor, and very French in manners and ways."

Mrs. Gaskell and Madame Mohl soon became great friends. From the first they were attracted to each other ; both were noted for their vivacity and humour, though Madame Mohl's was somewhat eccentric and opinionated, whilst Mrs. Gaskell was always noted for ordinary common sense and deference to the opinions of others, though she could well hold her own, if necessary. No trip to Paris in later days was complete without a visit to Madame Mohl, who for forty years received in her *salon* the distinguished literary

and scientific people from almost all the European countries. Dean Stanley, one of Mrs. Gaskell's greatest friends, first met his wife, Lady Augusta Bruce, at Madame Mohl's dinner table.

Traits and Stories of the Huguenots, published in *Household Words* in December, 1853, was the result of wide reading on the subject, as well as of collecting the traditional stories when in France. It shows Mrs. Gaskell's broad outlook on French history, and her sympathy with the French Huguenots, when they were compelled to leave their "pleasant land of France"; she cleverly brings in Sir Samuel Romilly's ancestors, as well as Harriet Martineau's and Mrs. Austen's. There are three stories in the article, all presumably true. Evidently the novelist had sufficient material for several French stories, though she closes abruptly: "I have now told all I know about the Huguenots. I pass the mark to someone else." This visit to France had directed Mrs. Gaskell's thoughts to that country. *My French Master* follows in the next two weekly numbers of *Household Words*. This short story is partly autobiographical, and refers to her own French master when a girl. The novelist's thoughts come so quickly, that the Frenchman—M. de Chalabre—is married, and has his grown-up daughters almost before the reader is able to grasp the fact. Everything concludes in the true love story fashion, both the daughters get married, and all ends happily. These French sketches show a prodigal waste of material, for the novelist leaves big gaps to be filled up by the reader's own imagination. The Christmas number of *Household Words* for 1853 contains the next contribution from the novelist's pen, in which she tells the true story of "Higgins, the noted Highwayman at Knutsford," under the title of *The Squire's Story*.

A ghost story or something containing an air of the

mysterious was considered by Mrs. Gaskell to be appropriate for this festive season. This story is founded on the facts which were handed down from one generation to another at Knutsford, and Mrs. Gaskell was very familiar with the noted highwayman's career, which she heard from her relations in Knutsford. As it is not to the credit of any town to have a noted burglar and murderer living within its borders, Barford is substituted for Knutsford to save its reputation, which, according to *Cranford*, was above reproach, in spite of the fears of Miss Matty and her friends when going along Darkness Lane.

During the summer months, Mrs. Gaskell did little writing. She gave herself up to travel and holidays, always with one or two of her children. Manchester saw little of the novelist from Easter until October. These holidays were halcyon days for her children, and they cherish the memories of those happy times in the country, or by the sea with their mother, who was more a companion than parent to her elder girls. When not actually writing, Mrs. Gaskell was weaving her stories and arranging her plots, and during the summer of 1853 *North and South* was simmering, and by the following summer was ready as a serial for *Household Words*. It was in the spring of this year that Charlotte Brontë paid her second and most memorable visit to Plymouth Grove, staying from Saturday, April 22nd, to the following Thursday. Evidently it was a happy time for both the novelists, for Charlotte Brontë writes of this visit as " the very brightest and healthiest I have known for these five years past." Mrs. Gaskell's home life, with her cultured husband and happy children, was a great contrast to that of Charlotte Brontë, in the grim, cheerless vicarage on the edge of the moors at Haworth, with her old, half-blind father. Well might

Charlotte Brontë write to Mrs. Gaskell on June 1st, 1853: "When you take leave of the domestic circle and turn your back on Plymouth Grove to come to Haworth, you must do it in the spirit which might sustain you, in case you were setting out on a brief trip to the backwoods of America. Leaving behind your husband, children, and civilisation, you must come out to barbarism, loneliness, and liberty." Mrs. Gaskell has given a very pleasant account of Charlotte Brontë's visit at this time.

It is almost futile to compare these two writers, whose names are so frequently linked together. Their outlook on life was so different, and they saw the world from such opposite points of view. Charlotte Brontë was a genius who wrote because she must, and, apart from her literary work, she had few resources. Her style of writing owed much to French literature, with which she was familiar. Mrs. Gaskell was a woman endowed with genius, but her writing was not influenced so much by what she read as by her experience in life, and her talent was greater than her genius. There was also a difference of circumstances as well as of temperament. Charlotte Brontë longed for change, and felt the fret of life at every point, and with her sister Emily could say:

> "What my soul bore, my soul alone
> Within itself may tell."

Mrs. Gaskell, with her sunny disposition, happy family life, and congenial atmosphere, was prepared to say with Browning:

> "How good is man's life, the mere living!
> How fit to employ
> All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!"

Charlotte Brontë experienced a difficulty in fitting into new places. Mrs. Gaskell, with her wonderful tact

and splendid powers of adaptability, "could make a heaven of a wilderness," as one of her friends remarked. "Don't you think that every power we have may be made to help us in any right work, whatever that is?" she wrote. Miss Brontë, on the other hand, was not very easy to live with. A friend of the family from Stonegappe—the Gateshead Hall of *Jane Eyre*—describes her as "a most difficult person to have for a governess. If you told her to do anything, she resented being treated as a servant; if you left her out in any arrangements, she said she was ignored." This agrees with Charlotte Brontë's own statement: "I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them." How different was Mrs. Gaskell! One of her friends, who was privileged to know her as a guest, states: "It was so delightful to have Mrs. Gaskell all to ourselves"; and another writes: "Southport has a halo of glory round it in my eyes now, because of Mrs. Gaskell's visit to us."

Charlotte Brontë was a difficult person to have as a guest, as Mrs. Gaskell found. An amusing incident occurred during this second visit, which was told to the present writer with evident relish by Mrs. Gaskell's youngest daughter in the drawing-room in which it occurred. A friend of Mrs. Gaskell's—Mrs. Sydney Potter, herself an author—called at 84, Plymouth Grove to meet Miss Brontë. She was announced in the drawing-room, where Mrs. Gaskell and her guest were conversing. Mrs. Gaskell rose to greet her visitor, and turned to introduce her to Miss Brontë, but she had vanished. Mrs. Gaskell thought she had left the room by the other door leading to the dining-room; but after Mrs. Sydney Potter's departure, she

emerged from behind one of the heavy window curtains, excusing herself by saying, " I felt I could not meet a stranger." Another time, thinking it not quite honourable thus to play eavesdropper, even unwillingly, she flew out of the drawing-room into the adjoining dining-room on the visitor's name being announced. Charlotte Brontë cherished very grateful memories of this week in Manchester. One of Mrs. Gaskell's daughters tells of Charlotte Brontë describing the acting of Madame Rachel during this visit, and how the little creature clenched her fists to emphasise her points. Mrs. Gaskell's daughters enjoyed the society of their mother's friend, and they describe her as a shy little woman, with large grey eyes, silky brown hair, and very, very shy. It is easy to read between the lines and see the gracious hostess at Plymouth Grove doing everything in her power to give Charlotte Brontë a good time. On the first day of the following June, Charlotte Brontë wrote to Mrs. Gaskell : " June is come, and now I want to know if you can come on Thursday, the 9th inst. Ever since I was at Manchester I have been anticipating your visit. Not that I attempt to justify myself in asking you ; the place has no attractions, as I told you, here in this house. Papa, too, takes great interest in the matter. I only pray that the weather may be fine, and that a cold, by which I am now stupefied, may be gone before the 9th, so that I may have no let and hindrance in taking you on to the moors—the sole, but, with one who loves nature as you do, not despicable, resource." Mrs. Gaskell evidently accepted the invitation to Haworth, for on June 6th Charlotte Brontë wrote to her friend, Ellen Nussey : " Mrs. Gaskell has written to say she will come on Thursday and stay till Monday " ; but the visit had to be postponed on account of Charlotte Brontë's illness, which

she much regretted. Mrs. Gaskell was disappointed, too, but in the meantime she had had the pleasure of receiving the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* at Plymouth Grove. Mrs. Beecher Stowe mentions the visit in her *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands*, in which she writes of meeting the author of *Mary Barton* at the house of one of her clerical friends. All who had the privilege of knowing Mrs. Gaskell seem to have been charmed with her beauty. Mrs. Beecher Stowe says: "She has a very lovely, gentle face, and looks capable of all the pathos that her writings show."

Mrs. Gaskell invited Mrs. Stowe to Plymouth Grove when she visited Manchester, and the invitation was accepted. Afterwards, when Mrs. Gaskell wrote to Charlotte Brontë, telling of her American visitor, Miss Brontë replied: "Your account of Mrs. Stowe was stimulatingly interesting. I long to see you, to get you to say it, and many other things all over again." In the following September, when Mrs. Gaskell visited Haworth, Charlotte Brontë referred to the subject: "She made many inquiries as to Mrs. Stowe's personal appearance," says Mrs. Gaskell, "and it evidently harmonised well with some theory of hers that the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was small and slight." In reference to this visit, Mrs. Gaskell writes: "I had promised to pay her a visit on my return from London in June; but, after the day was fixed, a letter came from Mr. Brontë, saying that she was suffering from so severe an attack of influenza, accompanied with such excruciating pain in the head, that he must request me to defer my visit until she was better. While sorry for the cause, I did not regret that my going was delayed till the season when the moors would be all glorious with the purple bloom of the heather; and thus present a scene about which she

had often spoken to me. So we agreed that I should not come to her before August or September. Meanwhile, I received a letter from which I am tempted to take an extract, as it shows both her conception of what fictitious writing ought to be, and her always kindly interest in what I was doing."

Mrs. Gaskell gives the letter, from which extracts are interesting as bearing on Mrs. Gaskell's happy, busy life :

"*July 9th*, 1853.

"Thank you for your letter ; it was as pleasant as a quiet chat, as welcome as spring showers, as reviving as a friend's visit ; in short, it was very like a page of *Cranford*. . . . A thought strikes me. Do you, who have so many friends—so large a circle of acquaintance—find it easy, when you sit down to write, to isolate yourself from all those ties, and their sweet associations, so as to be your *own woman*, uninfluenced or swayed by the consciousness of how your work may affect their minds ; what blame or what sympathy it may call forth ? Does no luminous cloud ever come between you and the severe Truth, as you know it in your own secret and clear-seeing soul ? In a word, are you ever tempted to make your characters more amiable than the Life, by the inclination to assimilate your thoughts to the thoughts of those who always *feel* kindly, but sometimes fail to *see* justly ? Don't answer the question ; it is not intended to be answered. . . . .

"Give my dear love to M[arianne] and M[eta], dear happy girls as they are. You cannot now transmit my message to F[lossy] and J[ulia]. I prized the little wild-flower—not that I think the sender cares for me ; she *does* not and *cannot*, for she does not know me ;—but no matter. In my reminiscences she is a person of a certain distinction. I think hers a

fine little nature, frank, and of genuine promise. I often see her, as she appeared stepping supreme from the portico towards the carriage, that evening we went to see *Twelfth Night*. I believe in J[ulia]'s future; I like what speaks in her movements, and what is written upon her face."

Little Julia Gaskell was at this time a pretty child of seven.

At the end of the summer, Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell, with their two elder daughters, Marianne and Meta, spent a holiday in Normandy, and it was not until September that she was able to pay her long promised visit to Haworth.

"Come to Haworth as soon as you can," wrote Charlotte Brontë; "the heath is in bloom now; I have waited and watched for its purple signal as the forerunner of your coming. It will not be quite faded before the 16th, but after that it will soon grow sere. Be sure to mention the day and hour of your arrival at Keighley. . . . I suppose that Meta is ere this returned to school again. This summer's tour will no doubt furnish a lifelong remembrance to her and Marianne. Great would be the joy of the little ones at seeing you all home again.

"I saw in the papers the death of Mr. S——, of scarlet fever, at his residence in Wales. Was it not there that you left Flossy and Julia? This thought occurred to me with chilling fears of what might happen; but I trust that all is safe now. How is poor Mrs. S——? Remember me very, very kindly to Mr. Gaskell and the whole circle. Write when you have time;—come at the earliest day."

It is pleasant to notice the growing intimacy between these two friends. Miss Brontë's interest in Mrs. Gaskell's children always appealed to her motherly heart. It is not possible that Mrs. Gaskell

could have known at this time that she would be Charlotte Brontë's biographer. Yet she made excellent use of her one brief visit to Miss Brontë's home, and employed part of her time whilst there in writing a long account of her visit. The letter, which appears in the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, is a good illustration of Mrs. Gaskell's keen interest in all that she saw and heard when on holiday, especially if the holiday included a visit to any person of note.

" Towards the latter end of September, 1853, I went to Haworth," writes Mrs. Gaskell in 1856. " At the risk of repeating something which I have previously said, I will copy out parts of a letter which I wrote at the time :

" It was a dull, drizzly, Indian-inky day, all the way on the railroad to Keighley, which is a rising, wool-manufacturing town, lying in a hollow between hills—not a pretty hollow, but more what the Yorkshire people call a ' bottom ' or ' botham.' I left Keighley in a car for Haworth, four miles off—four tough, steep, scrambling miles, the road winding between the wave-like hills that rose and fell on every side of the horizon, with a long, illimitable, sinuous look, as if they were a part of the line of the Great Serpent which the Norse legend says girdles the world. The day was lead-coloured ; the road had stone factories alongside of it—grey, dull-coloured rows of stone cottages belonging to these factories, and then we came to poor, hungry-looking fields ;—stone fences everywhere and trees nowhere. Haworth is a long, straggling village ; one steep, narrow street—so steep that the flagstones with which it is paved are placed end-ways, that the horses' feet may have something to cling to, and not slip down backwards, which if they did, they would soon reach Keighley. But if the horses had cats' feet and claws, they would do all

the better. Well, we (the man, horse, car and I) clambered up this street, and reached the church dedicated to St. Autest (who was he ?); then we turned off into a lane on the left, past the curate's lodging at the sexton's, past the school-house, up to the parsonage yard-door. I went round the house to the front door, looking to the church—moors everywhere beyond and above. The crowded graveyard surrounds the house and small grass enclosures for drying clothes.

"I don't know that I ever saw a spot more exquisitely clean; the most dainty place for that I ever saw. To be sure, the life is like clock-work. No one comes to the house; nothing disturbs the deep repose; hardly a voice is heard; you catch the ticking of the clock in the kitchen, or the buzzing of a fly in the parlour, all over the house. Miss Brontë sits alone in her parlour, breakfasting with her father in his study at nine o'clock. She helps in the housework; for one of their servants, Tabby, is nearly ninety, and the other only a girl. Then I accompanied her in her walks on the sweeping moors; the heather-bloom had been blighted by a thunderstorm a day or two before, and was all of a livid, brown colour, instead of the blaze of purple glory it ought to have been. Oh! those high, wild, desolate moors, up above the whole world, and the very realms of silence! Home to dinner at two. Mr. Brontë has his dinner sent in to him. All the small table arrangements had the same dainty simplicity about them. Then we rested, and talked over the clear, bright fire; it is a cold country, and the fires were a pretty warm, dancing light all over the house. The parlour has evidently been refurnished within the last few years, since Miss Brontë's success has enabled her to have a little more money to spend. Everything fits

into, and is in harmony with, the idea of a country parsonage, possessed by people of very moderate means. The prevailing colour of the room is crimson, to make a warm setting for the cold, grey landscape without. There is her likeness by Richmond, and an engraving from Lawrence's picture of Thackeray; and two recesses, on each side of the high, narrow, old-fashioned mantel-piece, filled with books—books given to her, books she has bought, and which tell of her individual pursuits and tastes; not standard books.

"She cannot see well, and does little besides knitting. The way she weakened her eyesight was this: When she was sixteen or seventeen, she wanted much to draw; and she copied nimini-pimini copper-plate engravings out of annuals—('stippling,' don't the artists call it?)—every little point put in, till at the end of six months she had produced an exquisitely faithful copy of the engraving. She wanted to learn to express her ideas by drawing. After she had tried to *draw* stories, and not succeeded, she took the better mode of writing; but in so small a hand, that it is almost impossible to decipher what she wrote at this time.

"But now to return to our quiet rest after dinner. I soon observed that her habits of order were such that she could not go on with the conversation, if a chair was out of its place; everything was arranged with delicate regularity. We talked over the old times of her childhood; of her elder sister's (Maria's) death—just like that of Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre;* of those strange, starved days at school; of the desire (almost amounting to illness) of expressing herself in some way—writing or drawing; of her weakened eyesight, which prevented her doing anything for two years, from the age of seventeen to

nineteen ; of her being a governess ; of her going to Brussels ; whereupon I said I disliked Lucy Snowe, and we discussed M. Paul Emanuel ; and I told her of ——'s admiration for *Shirley*, which pleased her, for the character of Shirley was meant for her sister Emily, about whom she is never tired of talking, nor I of listening. Emily must have been a remnant of the Titans—great-grand-daughter of the giants who used to inhabit earth. One day, Miss Brontë brought down a rough, common-looking oil painting done by her brother, of herself—a little, rather prim-looking girl of eighteen—and the two other sisters, girls of sixteen and fourteen, with cropped hair and sad, dreamy-looking eyes. . . . Emily had a great dog—half-mastiff, half-bulldog—so savage, etc. . . . This dog went to her funeral, walking side by side with her father ; and then, to the day of its death, it slept at her room door, snuffing under it, and whining every morning.

" We have generally had another walk before tea, which is at six ; at half-past eight, prayers ; and by nine, all the household are in bed, except ourselves. We sit up together till ten, or past ; and after I go, I hear Miss Brontë come down and walk up and down the room for an hour or so.—E. C. GASKELL."

Writing after Charlotte Brontë's death in 1856, Mrs. Gaskell says :

" Copying this letter has brought the days of that pleasant visit very clear before me—very sad in their clearness. We were so happy together ; we were so full of interest in each other's subjects. The day seemed only too short for what we had to say and to hear. I understood her life the better for seeing the place where it had been spent—where she had loved and suffered. Mr. Brontë was a most courteous host ; and when he was with us—at breakfast in his

study, or at tea in Charlotte's parlour—he had a sort of grand and stately way of describing past times, which tallied well with his striking appearance. He never seemed quite to have lost the feeling that Charlotte was a child to be guided and ruled, when she was present ; and she herself submitted to this with a quiet docility that half amused, half astonished me. But when she had to leave the room, then all his pride in her genius and fame came out. He eagerly listened to everything I could tell him of the high admiration I had heard at any time expressed for her works. He would ask for certain speeches over and over again, as if he desired to impress them on his memory.

" I remember two or three subjects of the conversations which she and I held in the evenings, besides those alluded to in my letter.

" I asked her whether she had ever taken opium, as the description given of its effects in *Villette* was so exactly like what I had experienced—vivid and exaggerated presence of objects, of which the outlines were indistinct, or lost in golden mist, etc. She replied, that she had never, to her knowledge, taken a grain of it in any shape, but that she had followed the process she always adopted when she had to describe anything which had not fallen within her own experience ; she had thought intently of it for many and many a night before falling to sleep—wondering what it was like, or how it would be—till at length, sometimes after the progress of her story had been arrested at this point for weeks, she wakened up in the morning with all clear before her, as if she had in reality gone through the experience, and then could describe it, word for word, as it had happened. I cannot account for this psychologically ; I only am sure that it was so, because she said it. . . .

"I recollect, too, her saying how acutely she dreaded a charge of plagiarism, when, after she had written *Jane Eyre*, she read the thrilling effect of the mysterious scream at midnight in Mrs. Marsh's story of *The Deformed*. She also said that, when she read *The Neighbours*, she thought everyone would fancy that she must have taken her conception of Jane Eyre's character from that of Francesca, the narrator of Miss Bremer's story. For my own part, I cannot see the slightest resemblance between the two characters, and so I told her; but she persisted in saying that Francesca was Jane Eyre married to a good-natured 'bear' of a Swedish surgeon.

"We went, not purposely, but accidentally, to see various poor people in our distant walks. From one we had borrowed an umbrella; in the house of another we had taken shelter from a rough September storm. In all these cottages her quiet presence was known. At three miles from her home, the chair was dusted for her, with a kindly, 'Sit ye down, Miss Brontë'; and she knew what absent or ailing members of the family to inquire after. Her quiet, gentle words, few though they might be, were evidently grateful to those Yorkshire ears. Their welcome to her, though rough and curt, was sincere and hearty.

"We talked about the different courses through which life ran. She said, in her own composed manner, as if she had accepted the theory as a fact, that she believed some were appointed beforehand to sorrow and much disappointment; that it did not fall to the lot of all—as Scripture told us—to have their lines fall in pleasant places; that it was well for those who had rougher paths, to perceive that such was God's will concerning them, and try to moderate their expectations, leaving hope to those of a different doom, and seeking patience and resignation as the

virtues they were to cultivate. I took a different view: I thought that human lots were more equal than she imagined; that, to some, happiness and sorrow came in strong patches of light and shadow (so to speak), while in the lives of others they were pretty equally blended throughout. She smiled, and shook her head, and said she was trying to school herself against ever anticipating any pleasure; that it was better to be brave and submit faithfully; that there was some good reason, which we should know in time, why sorrow and disappointment were to be the lot of some on earth. It was better to acknowledge this, and face out the truth in a religious faith."

Mrs. Gaskell's account of her one visit to Charlotte Brontë's home shows the two women writers in marked contrast, for they were not only different in disposition, but their outward circumstances were far from similar.

"We parted," says Mrs. Gaskell, "with many intentions, on both sides, of renewing very frequently the pleasure we had had in being together. We agreed that when she wanted bustle, or when I wanted quiet, we were to let each other know, and exchange visits as occasion required."

And yet, as an able literary critic says, in comparing these two writers: "When I want thunder, lightning and rain, I can read Charlotte Brontë; when I want sunshine and dewdrops, I turn to Mrs. Gaskell." Strange as it seems, one who lived a quiet, solitary life, in an isolated country vicarage, wrote novels that bristle with action, storm and passion; and the other, living in a large, busy household, with numerous calls on her time and patience, in the midst of the bustle of Manchester, gave the quiet, restful stories which charm, whilst they soothe and elevate. It was after this visit that Mrs. Gaskell wrote: "I was aware

that she had a great anxiety on her mind at this time; and being acquainted with its nature, I could not but deeply admire the patient docility which she displayed in her conduct towards her father." This anxiety which Mrs. Gaskell mentions so guardedly may have been Mr. Brontë's resort to intoxicants. In sorrow and trouble he gave way to his weakness, and since the death of his only son, followed by that of his two daughters; this, combined with his growing blindness, almost overwhelmed him. Many devotees of Charlotte Brontë have wondered—in the light of certain recent revelations concerning her feelings towards the man whom she married—that with her high sense of the marriage vows, and her views on what a woman should feel for her betrothed, she should have accepted the Rev. Arthur B. Nicholls. To some extent the solution is to be found in the fact that her lot was at times very difficult with regard to her father's failings; she disliked leaving him for any length of time with the servants, and she found it hard to manage him now she was alone. There are men and women in Haworth who still regretfully remember the old parson vainly trying to mount, with a dignified bearing, the steep road which leads to the vicarage. Various reasons have been given why Branwell, who was considered by his family the cleverest of that gifted group, should have become such a wreck on the shores of genius. Branwell Brontë was more sinned against than sinning in the opinion of those who knew him when a bright, merry lad, the pride of the village. Alas! if Branwell had received proper guidance and help from his father, he would not have become the wreck with which all readers are familiar. One of the old servants at the vicarage remarked to the present writer: "Emily Brontë died of a broken heart for love of her

brother Branwell. Emily realised more keenly than the others what he might have been had he been shielded from harm." Whilst his sisters had their aunt to share their confidence during their youth, Branwell, as the only boy, was left more to the father, who, unfortunately, let his love of ease interfere with the supervision which he ought to have given to his clever son. Whilst the Brontë sisters and the aunt were engaged with their needlework in the vicarage parlour during the long winter evenings, and the vicar was alone in his study, Branwell was often left to find his pleasure in his own way, and it is hardly to be wondered at that he found his way to the "Black Bull," only a few yards away from his home, where the worst side of his nature was flattered, and where he was always sure of a welcome. The life of the Brontë sisters makes sad reading, but Branwell's life was the saddest of all; and when Mrs. Gaskell heard his story from Charlotte, it is not to be wondered at that she took the sisters' view of the case, and threw the blame of his downfall on someone else, though in Mrs. Gaskell's own mind she must have thought the father careless about the welfare of his only son; and the loss of her own only boy would induce a motherly sympathy to find an excuse for the tragedy of Branwell Brontë's life. Mrs. Gaskell exercised much control in telling of the faults of the Rev. Patrick Brontë and his son, and she tried to be just to every member of that peculiar household. Years afterwards, Ellen Nussey endorsed what Mrs. Gaskell said about the old vicar's habit of firing his pistol every morning. Miss Gaskell told the present writer of a visit which she paid with her mother and sister to old Mr. Brontë; they found him ill in bed, and after a conversation with the old man, they called at the clockmaker's close by to buy a little souvenir

of their visit. The clockmaker showed them Mr. Brontë's pistol, which had just been sent to him to have a new spring put to the trigger, so that it would go off more easily. The trigger was altered and sent back, and Mr. Brontë continued firing his pistol almost to the last.

When Mrs. Gaskell was first introduced to the Brontë home, her conceptions of the duties pertaining to the head of the house must have received a shock. Her own husband not only carried out his pastoral and public duties efficiently, but devoted some time to the education of his own children and even to the children of some of his friends. The Misses Winkworth have left on record their high appreciation of the educational training, stimulus and taste for literature which they derived from his tuition.

In the home of her relative, the Rev. William Turner, at Newcastle, Mrs. Gaskell had observed the same self-sacrificing spirit abundantly recognised on all sides. The Rev. Patrick Brontë must have suffered considerably by comparison, even when due allowance had been made for his more advanced age. Where was the testimony to the work he should have done outside his own pulpit ? Why did he refuse to become familiar with his flock, only visiting when necessity demanded, as in cases of sickness or bereavement ? What could Mrs. Gaskell think of a father who was content to stay at home on account of church business, when his youngest daughter was being buried at Scarborough ? How could a father let his eldest daughter bear all the brunt of that sad time when Anne died, with no one to help and sympathise but the faithful Ellen Nussey ? These were questions that puzzled Mrs. Gaskell. The fact that the three daughters could each write a novel, as well as collaborate in a volume of poems, without their father's

knowledge, must have struck the author of *Cranford* as extraordinary. The old servants always spoke of Mr. Brontë as a kind master, but his sins of omission told against him in his family.

The summer of 1853 had, indeed, been a full one, and the information which the novelist gained was helpful in later days. Even when paying visits, Mrs. Gaskell gave her pen little rest, and her letters—long, interesting, and full of information about all she saw—provided her with abundant material for her stories.

During the winter of 1853–1854 Mrs. Gaskell was busy writing *North and South*, to which she gave much time and anxious thought. It was six years since *Mary Barton* had been published, and, possibly owing to the severe criticism from the Manchester manufacturers, the novelist had left Manchester and Manchester folk alone, preferring to write about Knutsford and Newcastle in *Cranford* and *Ruth*. The criticism of *Mary Barton* had certainly given Mrs. Gaskell an insight into the side of the question from the manufacturers' standpoint, and although she had written *Mary Barton* in defence of the poor operatives, ignoring almost entirely any desire on the part of the cotton employers of labour to alter the sad state of things, she had during the intervening six years time to see both sides of the question fairly, though the fact that trade had revived and that the Repeal of the Corn Laws had altered the lives of the operatives must not be lost sight of. *Mary Barton* dealt with the never-to-be-forgotten times of the "Hungry Forties," whilst *North and South* treats of a period some ten years later. No woman who ever wrote novels had a greater desire to act the part of peacemaker than Mrs. Gaskell. It was not her *rôle* to be a mischief-maker in any sense of the word. She

abhorred those who were fond of stirring up strife of any kind, and when *Mary Barton* was supposed by some unduly to take the side of the workpeople against the masters, no one was more surprised than the author herself. It was well known by Mrs. Gaskell's own circle that, once such a book was finished, the author at once set off for a holiday far away from the scenes of which she had been writing, and, moreover, the subject of the book was also banished. After giving all her best thoughts and energies to a novel, when it was completed she strove to forget it, and leave it to its fate. After six years, having written successful novels of other scenes and other times, she was able to bring a well-balanced mind back to the subject of the Manchester operatives, and no book of hers has shown a greater mastery of her subject; *North and South* is by many of her critics considered her best work. Though not in the least sensational, it holds the reader to the end, and its characters are true to life. Mrs. Gaskell's two intimate contemporaries were both consulted about the probable success of such a book. Dickens, who was then engaged on his *Hard Times*, hailed Mrs. Gaskell's scheme of the story with enthusiasm, and it is significant that both were treating of the manufacturing districts in Lancashire at practically the same time. The fact that Dickens sent his story, before publication, to Mrs. Gaskell, asking for her judgment about his new venture in writing of something outside his own experience, but distinctly in Mrs. Gaskell's province, shows the reciprocal feeling between the writers. *Hard Times* was published in *Household Words* from April 1st to August 12th, 1854; and Mrs. Gaskell was so far advanced with *North and South*, that her first contribution appeared in September of the same year, and extended until January, 1855. Whether it

was the influence of Dickens' writing of Lancashire life that prompted Mrs. Gaskell to turn her thoughts once more to "Cottonopolis," or the feeling that the time was opportune for a story showing both sides of the industrial question in Lancashire, is uncertain. Probably both facts had something to do with the production of one of the best novels of that period. In writing of the relation between employers and employees in Manchester, Mrs. Gaskell was able to give actual facts from her own observation and experience, and there is not the slightest doubt that Mr. Gaskell was very helpful in giving suggestions and criticism of the story as it progressed, for he was certainly more familiar than his wife with anything pertaining to Manchester life. It is to his experience in visiting among the poor of the Manchester slums, as well as to his wife's visits, that the faithful pictures of humble life depicted both in *Mary Barton* and *North and South* are due.

In 1854 Mr. Gaskell published his lectures on the Lancashire dialect, and they were appended to the fifth edition of *Mary Barton.* Thus husband and wife had their writings on Lancashire life appearing side by side, a fact that pleased Mrs. Gaskell very much, as she was always anxious that her husband should get his true appreciation as a writer as well as a preacher, and by issuing these lectures in the same volume as *Mary Barton,* there was a chance of their getting a much wider circulation than if they had been kept—as originally intended—in one small book, of interest to few but Manchester people. Mr. Gaskell was an able authority on the Lancashire dialect, and it is said that he never lost an opportunity of hearing it spoken by the native. One of his old pupils tells of seeing him leave a first-class railway carriage and join a number of Lancashire workmen in a third-class

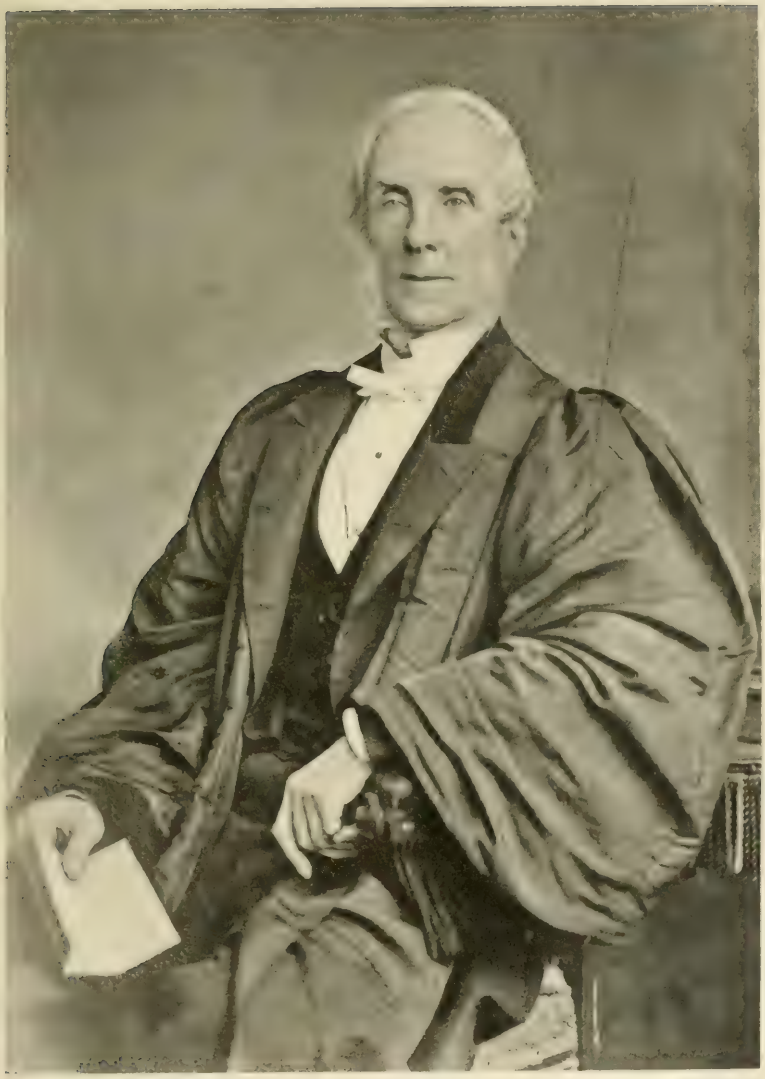
compartment, in order to hear them speak in the true Lancashire dialect.

Mrs. Gaskell's Manchester stories demonstrate the true unity of spirit that existed between husband and wife, the latter loving to do just the work in which the former delighted. Indeed, she was so anxious to please him, rather than the outside world, that she often wished him to decide what she was to do beyond her own sphere as wife and mother, and such was the mutual love between them, that Mr. Gaskell always left his wife quite free to follow her own inclinations. What pleased her would certainly satisfy him.

> "They were so one, it never could be said
> Which of them ruled, and which of them obeyed.
> There was between them but this one dispute,
> 'Twas which the other's will should execute."

These lines, which exactly describe the relations between Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell, were written in one of Mrs. Gaskell's three papers on *French Life*, and refer to Madame de Circourt and her husband; there was also a reference to Madame de Circourt and her home, which exactly fitted the Gaskell's home in Manchester: "Is not Christianity the very core of the heart of all gracious courtesy? I am sure it was so with Madame de Circourt. There never was a house where the weak and dull and humble got such kind and unobtrusive attention, or felt so happy and at home. There never was a place that I heard of, where learning and genius and worth were more truly appreciated, and felt more sure of being understood."

These words will appeal to those who have been privileged to enjoy the hospitality of 84, Plymouth Grove as being true not only of the days when Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell lived there, but of a later period,



Yours faithfully
William Gaskell

when Mrs. Gaskell's two unmarried daughters continued the same gracious courtesy which still reigns there, though only one daughter is left to represent it.

On the 18th April, 1854, Charlotte Brontë wrote to Mrs. Gaskell to tell of her intended marriage to the Rev. A. B. Nicholls, her father's former curate, who, after his marriage, was to return and live at the vicarage at Haworth. The letter is very quiet, and not at all enthusiastic, the great point gained seems to be that Mr. Nicholls promises faithful support and consolation to Mr. Brontë in his old age, for which Charlotte Brontë says she is very grateful, and means to try to make both her future husband and her father happy, though she mentions, both in this letter and in the one to Miss Wooler, that her union with Mr. Nicholls will not be a brilliant match, which makes her almost cry sometimes because she cannot better satisfy her father's perhaps natural pride. This letter was followed by a visit to Plymouth Grove in the first week in May. In her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* Mrs. Gaskell says: "At the beginning of May, Miss Brontë left home to pay three visits before her marriage. The first was to us. She only remained three days, as she had to go to the neighbourhood of Leeds, there to make such purchases as were required for her marriage. Her preparations, as she said, could neither be expensive nor extensive, consisting chiefly in a modest replenishing of her wardrobe, some re-papering and re-painting in the parsonage; and, above all, converting the small flagged passage-room, hitherto used only for stores (which was behind her sitting-room) into a study for her husband. On this idea, and plans for his comfort, as well as her father's, her mind dwelt a good deal; and we talked them over with the same unwearying happiness which, I suppose, all women feel in such discussions—especially

when money considerations call for that kind of contrivance which Charles Lamb speaks of in his *Essay on Old China,* as forming so great an addition to the pleasure of obtaining a thing at last."

This short visit was the last meeting of the two novelists, for Mrs. Gaskell was not asked to the wedding. The only two friends of Miss Brontë who were invited were her old schoolmistress, Miss Wooler, and her faithful friend, Ellen Nussey; but in the following October Mrs. Gaskell was asked, along with these two friends, to pay a visit to the newly-wedded pair. "I was to have gone also, but I allowed some little obstacle to intervene, to my lasting regret," writes Mrs. Gaskell. Although Mrs. Gaskell only mentions "some little obstacle," it is not improbable that she kindly refused, so that Mrs. Nicholls should have her two old friends first, meaning to pay a visit later. Just before Miss Brontë's visit to Plymouth Grove, Mr. Gaskell's senior colleague, the Rev. John Gooch Robberds, died on April 21st. This was a great grief to Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell, for Mr. Robberds had been a faithful friend as well as a colleague, and the bond between the two families had been strengthened as the years went by. The widow, daughter of the Rev. William Turner of Newcastle, stayed on in Green Heys with her old father, who was now ninety-three. There is a brass tablet to the memory of Mr. Robberds in the Cross Street Chapel, Manchester. Mr. Gaskell now became senior minister, and his stipend was increased. He laboured in the same church for nearly thirty years after this.

In the autumn Mrs. Gaskell went to Paris with her eldest daughter. France had a peculiar attraction for her, and the grace and courtesy of the French women always appealed to her. Whilst in Paris she again visited Madame Mohl, and it is probably to her

that the delightful paper on *Company Manners*, which was published during this year, refers.

Most of Mrs. Gaskell's holidays furnished "copy," and in that way each holiday helped to pay the expenses of the next. *Modern Greek Songs* and *Company Manners* were both published in 1854, in *Household Words*. The first was a review of Claude Fauriel's book on *Chants Populaires de la Grèce Moderne*, which was published in 1824-25, in two volumes. Mrs. Gaskell gives a chatty account of the contents of the book. She was always attracted to village customs; she tells how the Greeks kept their festivals in song. She also refers to a visit she paid in Manchester to a Greek family at Eastertide, describing the way in which the Greeks celebrate the Easter festival. To illustrate the Greeks' belief in sending messages by the dead, she tells a good Lancashire story, which once more shows Mrs. Gaskell's love of humour even on serious subjects. "A poor man lay a-dying, but still perfectly sensible and acute. A woman of his acquaintance came to see him, who had lately lost her husband. . . . 'Bill,' said she, 'where thou art bound to thou'lt maybe see our Tummas; be sure thou tell him we have getted th' wheel o' the shandry mended, and it's mostly as good as new; and mind thou say'st we're getten on vary weel without him; he may as weel think so, poor chap!' To which Bill made answer: 'Why, woman! dost 'oo think I'se have nought better to do than go clumping up and down the sky a-searching for thy Tummas?'"

Whether Mrs. Gaskell was under contract to supply so many short stories or articles, as well as a serial to *Household Words*, is not certain, but she kept up her regular contributions well, and never seemed to be at a loss for a subject, although, when collected, they form a very miscellaneous gathering. *Company*

Manners is quite a subject after Mrs. Gaskell's own heart, for she loved to practise and teach the right way to entertain, and in this advisory talk on how to hold a reception she is quite at home. The model Frenchwoman, who had all the requisites which enabled her to entertain with honour to herself and pleasure to her friends was Madame de Sablé, according to M. Cousin's biography, of which Mrs. Gaskell says: "Now, since I have read these memoirs of Madame de Sablé, I have thought much and deeply thereupon. At first, I was inclined to laugh at the extreme importance which was attached to this art of 'receiving company,' no, that translation will not do! 'holding a drawing-room' is even worse, because that implies the state and reserve of royalty—shall we call it the art of 'Sabléing.'" The novelist goes on to give her readers the benefit of a conversation which she has with a French friend. "Said the French lady: 'A woman to be successful in Sabléing must be past youth, yet not past the power of attracting. She must do this by her sweet and gracious manners, and quick, ready tact in perceiving those who have not had their share of attention, or leading the conversation away from any subject which may give pain to any one present.'" Mrs. Gaskell affirms that those rules hold good in England. After giving the French rules, Mrs. Gaskell goes on to give advice to those who wish to become successful hostesses, and the article gives the Mid-Victorian views on how to entertain properly; but Mrs. Gaskell, never over-fastidious about etiquette, concludes by saying: "If people are really good and wise, their goodness and their wisdom flow out unconsciously and benefit like sunlight."

In 1854, Mrs. Gaskell visited Florence Nightingale in her home at Harley Street. Miss Nightingale had been much interested in *Ruth*, and Mrs. Gaskell, always

a great admirer of Miss Nightingale's previous work, was greatly interested in her efforts for the uplifting of the nursing profession. Miss Nightingale, it may be added, approved of Ruth having practice as an amateur before going to the hospital as a professional nurse.

The year 1855 opened anxiously for Mrs. Gaskell, for her good uncle, Peter Holland, the Knutsford surgeon, died on January 19th, at the age of eighty-nine. He had been ill for some time, and had been tenderly nursed by his daughters, Mary and Lucy Holland. Dr. Holland had been a second father to Mrs. Gaskell in her childhood, and she gratefully cherished his memory. Early in this year, Mrs. Gaskell published *North and South* in book form, with a short explanatory preface, which says: "On its first appearance in *Household Words*, this tale was obliged to conform to the conditions imposed by the requirements of a weekly publication, and likewise to confine itself within certain advertised limits, in order that faith might be kept with the public. Although these conditions were made as light as they well could be, the author found it impossible to develop the story in the manner originally intended, and, more especially, was compelled to hurry on events with an improbable rapidity towards the close. In some degree to remedy this obvious defect, various short passages have been inserted, and several new chapters added. With this brief explanation, the tale is commended to the kindness of the reader:

> "'Beseking hym lowly, of mercy and pité,
> Of its rude makyng to have compassion.'"

Lizzie Leigh and other Tales was also published, and for *Household Words* three new short stories—*An Accursed Race*, *Half a Lifetime Ago*, and *The*

Poor Clare—were written. These three stories were included in *Round the Sofa* which was issued in 1859 with an introduction, and also the stories entitled *My Lady Ludlow*, *The Doom of the Griffiths*, and *The Half-Brothers*.

An Accursed Race was the second of the *Round the Sofa* stories. It appeared first, as a short story in *Household Words* on August 25th, 1855. In *Round the Sofa*, the novelist represents her story as being a paper read before the Edinburgh Philosophical Society. She would be familiar with the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society's papers through Mr. Turner, who was the secretary. The story deals with the persecution of a people who were supposed to have descended from lepers, although all distinct traces of their origin are lost.

Mrs. Gaskell's great aversion was intolerance of any kind. She was broad-minded and charitable to others, and could always place herself in the position of those holding different views. Bigotry she abhorred. As a Unitarian, she knew something of narrow-minded people's intolerance towards those who were not orthodox. In one of her letters she refers to the kindness of a family of the name of Kennett, who were neighbours of the Stevensons in Beaufort Row, Chelsea ; and she mentions the sole remaining member of this family, Fanny Kennett, who had been dreadfully shocked to hear that Elizabeth Stevenson had married a Unitarian minister.

When Charlotte Brontë was staying with the Gaskells, she refused to accompany them to their own place of worship at Cross Street on the Sunday, preferring to go alone to the nearest parish church, All Saints. Ellen Nussey, when a visitor at Plymouth Grove, had the same prejudice, and acted in the same manner. It is strange, after this experience, to know

that Charlotte Brontë should have expressed a wish before her marriage, that Mr. Nicholls might get to know Mr. Gaskell, in order to obtain a broader view of other sects and their beliefs. Possibly Miss Brontë went to All Saints to please her father and her intended husband, who were both prejudiced against Dissenters, though Mr. Brontë was not so intolerant as Mr. Nicholls, and he always got on well with the Dissenters at Haworth.

In *The Accursed Race* Mrs. Gaskell is in her element when trying to show that there was no case against this so-called leprosy race of Cagots, and she begins by driving home the injustice of intolerance amongst all races :

" We have our prejudices in England, or, if that assertion offends any of my readers, I will modify it : we have had our prejudices in England. We have tortured Jews ; we have burnt Catholics and Protestants, to say nothing of a few witches and wizards. We have satirised Puritans, and we have dressed up Guys. But, after all, I do not think we have been so bad as our Continental friends. To be sure, our insular position has kept us free, to a certain degree, from the inroads of alien races, who, driven from one land of refuge, steal into another equally unwilling to receive them, and where, for long centuries, their presence is barely endured, and no pains is taken to conceal the repugnance which the natives of ' pure blood ' experience towards them."

This account of *An Accursed Race* goes back to the fifteenth century, and is probably founded on the account given in *Histoire des Races Maudites de la France et de l'Espagne* (2 vols., Paris, 1847). In reading it, one is conscious that civilisation has done something in later days to uproot such cruel prejudices as held sway in the valleys of the Pyrenees, in the

Landes near Bordeaux, and stretching up on the west side of France into Lower Brittany. Mrs. Gaskell knew these districts well. Her usual custom was to investigate the history of the place and people, in order to use the information in her story. All through the account of this poor, down-trodden, persecuted race, she shows how powerful custom is, as compared with the law or ordinary justice. It is impossible to say whether it is a fact, as stated in the story, that a Cagot once played the congregation at Larroque a trick by slyly locking the great parish door of the church while the greater part of the inhabitants were attending mass inside, and put gravel into the lock itself so as to prevent the use of any duplicate key, and had the pleasure of seeing the proud, pure-blooded people file out with bended head through the small, low door used by the abhorred Cagots. The novelist tells us that even after the Cagots had obtained permission to attend church, they were obliged to enter and return through a small door which was provided for them, so that they might not come in contact with the pure-blooded people. Mrs. Gaskell's conclusion takes us back to her school days at Stratford-on-Avon once more:

"We are naturally shocked at discovering, from facts such as these, the causeless rancour with which innocent and industrious people were so recently persecuted. The moral of the history of *The Accursed Race* may, perhaps, be best conveyed in the words of the epitaph on Mrs. Mary Hand, who lies buried in the churchyard of Stratford-on-Avon:

"'What faults you saw in me,
Pray strive to shun;
And look at home; there's
Something to be done.'"

These lines must have impressed her, for she

quoted this verse twenty-eight years after leaving school; although she tells us that she never visited Stratford-on-Avon after leaving it as a schoolgirl.

Half a Lifetime Ago appeared in *Household Words* in October, 1855. It is a story of the Lake District, always a favourite holiday spot of Mrs. Gaskell. The peace and quiet of the Westmoreland dales acted as a tonic to her tired nerves, and she often spent a considerable part of the autumn on these lonely hills and in the quiet dales. The associations of the Lake country attracted her, for it was here that she met Wordsworth, Ruskin, Arnold of Rugby, W. E. Forster, Froude, Harriet Martineau, Crabbe Robinson, and, as we have seen, Charlotte Brontë. Mrs. Gaskell often wished for a cottage in this district, and had it not been for the bleak climate in winter, she would have purchased one here in preference to the country house in the South, which she bought in 1865. Literary shrines and literary people always had a great fascination for her. This locality was full of the associations of the poets whom she loved, and she retained happy memories of those she met.

In the reminiscences of Henry Crabbe Robinson, the following reference to Mrs. Gaskell occurs:

"*Sunday night, October 14th,* 1849.

"Froude has been here this summer (at the Lakes). He was—as I was informed—for I did not see him, at a farmhouse at or near Skelwith Bridge. Mrs. Gaskell, the author of *Mary Barton*, was also for some weeks in that neighbourhood, and I got Mr. Wordsworth to meet her and her husband (a Unitarian minister at Manchester). She is a very pleasing, interesting person."

Mrs. Gaskell stayed at Skelwith in 1849. Skelwith Force and the bridge, so familiar to tourists, are still

very lonely spots. Mrs. Gaskell directs us to the old house on the Oxenfell Road between Skelwith and Coniston : " You go along a moorland track, made by the carts that occasionally come for turf from Oxenfell ; a brook babbles and brattles by the wayside, giving you a sense of companionship, which relieves the deep solitude in which this way is usually traversed." Then comes a picture of the old farmstead managed by Susan Dixon, the " stateswoman "—to use the Westmoreland term :

" The house is no specimen, at the present day, of what it was in the lifetime of Susan Dixon. Then, every small diamond pane in the windows glittered with cleanliness. You might have eaten off the floor ; you could see yourself in the pewter plates and the polished oaken awmry, or dresser, of the state kitchen into which you entered."

These homely descriptions are like Dutch miniatures, and lend themselves to the novelist's pen. In *Ruth*, *Mary Barton*, *Sylvia's Lovers*, and *Cousin Phillis*, the homeliness of the spotless kitchen, with its shining crockery, finds a place in her descriptions. This story of *Half a Lifetime Ago* is of a Westmoreland daleswoman, and the beautiful devotion to her young brother, who is a weakling and becomes half an idiot. Susan Dixon gave the promise to her mother on her death-bed, that she would never desert " Lile Will," and the keeping of her promise is the means of losing her lover, and condemns her to a hard, lonely life for many years. The dying mother's last words were sacred to Susan Dixon :

" ' Lile Will will miss me most of all. Father's often vexed with him because he's not a quick, strong lad ; he is not, my poor lile chap. And father thinks he's saucy, because he cannot always stomach oatcake and porridge. There's better than three pound

in th' old black teapot on the top shelf of the cupboard. Just keep a piece of loaf-bread by you, Susan dear, for Will to come to when he's not taken his breakfast. I have, maybe, spoilt him, but there'll be no one to spoil him now.' She began to cry, a low, feeble cry, and covered up her face that Susan might not see her. That dear face! Those precious moments, while yet the eyes could look out with love and intelligence! Susan laid her head down close by her mother's ear.

"'Mother, I'll take tent of Will. Mother, do you hear? He shall not want aught I can give or get for him, least of all the kind words which you had ever ready for us both. Bless you! bless you! my own mother.'

"'Thou'lt promise me that, Susan, wilt thou? I can die easy if thou'lt take charge of him.'"

Then follow the giving up of her lover, the devotion to "Lile Will," and the lonely life after his death; afterwards, the finding in the snow of the long-lost lover, who is the husband of another; the cry, "'Oh, God! Oh, help!'" and the brave woman's awful struggle through the snow.

"She lowered her lantern: there lay a man, prone on his face, nearly covered by the fast-falling flakes; he must have fallen from the rock above, as, not knowing of the circuitous path, he had tried to descend its steep, slippery face. Who could tell? It was no time for thinking. Susan lifted him up with her wiry strength; he gave no help—no sign of life; but for all that he might be alive; he was still warm; she tied her maud round him; she fastened the lantern to her apron-strings; she held him tight, half-carrying, half-dragging—what did a few bruises signify to him, compared to dear life, to precious life! She got him through the brake and down the path. There, for an

instant, she stopped to take breath ; but, as if stung by the Furies, she pushed on again with almost superhuman strength. Clasping him round the waist, and leaning his dead weight against the lintel of the door, she tried to undo the latch."

She succeeds in carrying her burden to the farm kitchen, where she recognises him as Michael Hurst, her old lover. With infinite care she seeks to bring him back to consciousness.

" From time to time she bent over the face afresh ; sick, and fain to believe that the flicker of the firelight was some slight convulsive motion. But the dim, staring eyes struck chill to her heart. . . . She thought over all the possibilities and chances in the mingled yarn of their lives that might, by so slight a turn, have ended far otherwise. . . . In going over this weary chain of unrealised possibilities, Susan learnt the force of Peggy's words : ' Life was short, looking back upon it.' It seemed but yesterday since all the love of her being had been poured out, and run to waste. The intervening years—the long monotonous years that had turned her into an old woman before her time—were but a dream."

The story has a characteristic and beautiful ending. Susan Dixon takes the wife and children of her lost lover and brings them up in the Yew Nook Farm, to live there and fill up the haunted hearth with living forms that should banish the ghosts. " And so it fell out that the latter days of Susan Dixon's life were better than the former."

The Poor Clare was first published in *Household Words* in December, 1856, a little more than a year after *An Accursed Race* and *Half a Lifetime Ago.* In this case the novelist selects North East Lancashire as the scene in which the story is laid, a wild district, which is said to be " the least known district

of all England." There has always been a strong Roman Catholic element in this part of England, and the well-known Stonyhurst College was built near by, to provide higher education for the sons of the wealthier Roman Catholic families. At the time of the opening of the story, 1747, there was a strong Jacobean influence in this part of England, and the Stuart pretenders had many sympathisers and adherents in the Trough of Bolland. The chief figures in the tale are Roman Catholics, who suffer for their adherence to the Stuart cause.

Old mansions such as Starkey Manor-House always set Mrs. Gaskell's thoughts running on a story. She would visit the place over and over again, weaving round it a tale of romance in which some of the former residents flitted about as ghosts, reminding her of the past history. The tale has some points of resemblance to *Lois the Witch*, which, however, was not published until three years afterwards. Bridget Fitzgerald, the leading character in the story, is considered by many to be a witch, and only the protection of powerful friends saved her from a witch's fate.

" It was no wonder that those who dared to listen outside her door at night believed that she held converse with some spirit ; in short, she was unconsciously earning for herself the dreadful reputation of a witch."

When Mrs. Gisborne enquires who she is, an answer given by an old servant of the Starkeys is : " 'It will be the old witch that his worship means. She needs a ducking, if ever a woman did, does that Bridget Fitzgerald.' " The village clergyman but reflected the spirit of the times : " 'The Coldholme witch ! the Irish Papist ! I'd have had her ducked long since but for that other Papist, Sir Philip Tempest. He

has had to threaten honest folk about here over and over again, or they'd have had her up before the justices for her black doings, and it's the law of the land that witches should be burnt. Ay, and of Scripture, too, sir! Yet you see a Papist, if he's a rich squire, can overrule both law and Scripture. I'd carry a faggot myself to rid the country of her!'"

The narrator of the story refers to New England and witchcraft: "He spoke of those strange New England cases which had happened not so long before; of Mr. Defoe, who had written a book, wherein he had named many modes of subduing apparitions, and sending them back whence they came; and, lastly, he spoke low of dreadful ways of compelling witches to undo their witchcraft. But I could not endure to hear of these tortures and burnings." In addition to witchcraft, the idea of a dual personality is introduced in the story. This belief in spirits and a dual personality is frequently introduced in Mrs. Gaskell's earlier writings. Both of Mrs. Gaskell's Manchester novels contain head lines at the beginning of certain chapters, showing her belief in the borderland and the influence of the spirits of those who have departed.

> "So on those happy days of yore
> Oft as I dare to dwell once more,
> Still must I miss the friends so tried
> Whom Death has severed from my side.
>
> But ever when true friendship binds,
> Spirit it is that spirit finds;
> In spirit then our bliss we found,
> In spirit yet to them I'm bound."

In another chapter of *North and South* the novelist quotes Wallenstein:

> "My heart revolts within me, and two voices
> Make themselves audible within my bosom."

Unlike present-day authors, she believed in " the two in one " rather than one person assuming two different characters at different times and in different places, to suit the convenience of the writer. In the story the novelist introduces the person accompanied by what would be considered her ghost :

" 'In the great mirror opposite I saw myself, and, right behind, another wicked, fearful self, so like me that my soul seemed to quiver within me, as though not knowing to which similitude of body it belonged. My father saw my Double at the same moment, either in its dreadful reality, whatever that might be, or in the scarcely less reflection in the mirror. . . . Just at that instant, standing as I was opposite to her in the full and perfect morning light, I saw behind her another figure—a ghastly resemblance, complete in likeness, as far as form and feature and minutest touch of dress could go, but with a loathsome demon soul looking out of the grey eyes, that were, in turns, mocking and voluptuous. . . . I know not why, but I put out my hand to clutch it ; I grasped nothing but empty air, and my whole blood curdled to ice.' " Bridget Fitzgerald enters a convent at Antwerp, and becomes Sister Magdalen of the " Poor Clares," who devote their lives to service among the poor. It is probable that the novelist introduced this special Roman Catholic Sisterhood by coming in touch with one of their convents at Levenshulme, which is less than two miles from Plymouth Grove.

The death of Charlotte Brontë Nicholls on Easter Sunday, March 31st, 1855, came as a great shock to Mrs. Gaskell. Outside the Brontë family circle—and how small that was—there was no one except Charlotte's old friend, Ellen Nussey, and her former schoolmistress, Miss Wooler, who felt the blow more keenly than Mrs. Gaskell. Although their friendship

had only extended over seven years, yet it was very sincere, and there are many proofs in Mrs. Gaskell's "Life" of her friend of the *camaraderie* which existed between them. Mrs. Gaskell did not attend the funeral, but in the "Life" she gives a very faithful account of the sad event which she had received from eye-witnesses. It was fortunate that she had had a few opportunities of getting to know the real Charlotte Brontë, for the very favourable impression which she made on Charlotte Brontë's father, during her one visit to Haworth Vicarage, prompted him to ask her to write his famous daughter's "Life," and without this personal intercourse it would have been difficult to reveal Charlotte Brontë as a woman apart from her literary work. The letters that passed between these two writers were full of mutual respect, but in the "Life" it would have been more satisfactory to have seen both sides of the correspondence; but Mrs. Gaskell, with characteristic modesty, keeps herself in the background.

Shortly after Charlotte Brontë's death, erroneous statements with regard to her life began to appear in the Press. At first, those most concerned took little notice of them, but it soon became evident that an authentic biography was needed; and the choice of a writer fell upon Mrs. Gaskell. Mr. Brontë wrote to her in most generous terms, asking her to undertake the task, and offering to provide all the information in his power. It is possible that the shy, sensitive Charlotte would have shrunk from having her life written, but if it was necessary to acquiesce, her choice would probably have fallen on Mrs. Gaskell. In any case, she would have preferred a woman biographer to a man, for in one of her letters she says:

"One woman can appreciate the value of another better than a man can do"; and in *Shirley* she

writes: "Men, I believe, fancy women's minds something like those of children." Mr. Nicholls at first objected to his wife's life being written, but afterwards he consented, partly as a result of Miss Nussey's urgent request. Miss Nussey gave every possible help, and it is largely due to her that we possess the deeply interesting *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Mrs. Gaskell eagerly accepted the *rôle* of biographer, and set to work with characteristic thoroughness to gather all the material for her book. At first she feared that there would not be sufficient facts of interest to make a fair-sized volume, and on telling Mr. Brontë so, he replied: "Well, madam, if there is not enough, surely you can easily invent something." But when she got to work she found she had sufficient material for two volumes, producing a biography which rivals in interest and pathos any other life story of a woman writer. Before commencing the book, Mrs. Gaskell took rooms at the "Black Bull" in Haworth, staying there for some days with her husband, who was an invaluable help in gathering information. This visit was paid on July 23rd, 1855, and Mrs. Gaskell had gathered all her material together before the end of August. She interviewed not only Mr. Brontë and Mr. Nicholls, both of whom she confessed to being afraid of, but also the servants, past and present, at the Vicarage. She took long drives around Haworth, visiting all the haunts of the Brontë sisters, except Stonegappe in Lothersdale, and the house at Rawdon, the two places where Charlotte Brontë was governess. Both places were worthy of a visit, especially Stonegappe, because of its associations with the opening chapters of *Jane Eyre*. A visit to Miss Nussey's home at Birstall followed, and there Mrs. Gaskell gained much valuable information of the Brontës' private life. She had, further, an interview

at Dewsbury with Miss Wooler, Charlotte Brontë's kind schoolmistress, who was always pleased to chat about her clever pupil. She also visited the Clergy Daughters' School at Casterton, which succeeded Lowood, and of which Mrs. Gaskell had nothing but praise both for the management and general aspect, and Cowan Bridge, the Lowood of *Jane Eyre*—which Mrs. Gaskell evidently saw through Charlotte Brontë's spectacles, for it is not a dreary or unhealthy spot, though it is in a valley with the "beck" or stream flowing through. Having exhausted all the sources of information in the Brontë country, Mrs. Gaskell went to London and interviewed Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., Charlotte Brontë's publishers, and Mr. W. S. Williams, to whom the honour of discovering Charlotte Brontë really belongs, for it was he who had advised the acceptance of *Jane Eyre*, and had encouraged Charlotte Brontë after refusing *The Professor*. Next, the biographer proceeded to Brussels, to the school where Charlotte Brontë had first been a pupil and afterwards a teacher. Here Madame Heger refused to see her, for she had had much to regret with regard to the Brontë girls' residence at the school, and probably felt that Charlotte had overstepped the confidence which is expected from one who lives in a family and sees life behind the scenes. Mons. Heger, however, received Mrs. Gaskell very kindly, and supplied the information which she was seeking, "and very much I both like and esteem him," wrote Mrs. Gaskell. With notes from all these places, and Charlotte Brontë's letters to Miss Nussey and others, she began, during the autumn of 1855, to plan the "Life." It was with a real sense of duty to her subject that she undertook the task, and she determinedly kept herself in the background, working steadily on, writing facts that

startled her as she wrote, and still more the members of her family when she read her manuscript to them. The biography occupied her a little more than a year. One of Mrs. Gaskell's old friends, Miss Winkworth, in a letter to her sister from Lindeth Tower, Silverdale, states that Mrs. Gaskell's quest for material for Miss Brontë's "Life" had been most successful, and—always an ardent admirer of Mrs. Gaskell—she remarks that "she will make a capital thing of the 'Life,' and show people how lives ought to be written." Mrs. Gaskell's publishers, Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., were not anxious to issue the biography unduly soon, implying that it would be considered indelicate and wanting in respect to the dead to publish the work at too short an interval from her death. How differently the public and the publishers look upon such events nowadays! A great man dies, and before he is buried, life sketches and biographies spring up as by magic.

The account Mrs. Gaskell has given of the Haworth district and people is not considered very flattering or accurate by those who have been reared in the parish. Compared with Knutsford, the moors of Haworth must have appeared wild and desolate, and the village type of Yorkshire character which Mrs. Gaskell met no doubt seemed rough and uncouth. If, however, she had lived in the village for some years, she would probably have modified her views, and the beauties of the district would have appealed to her. She would, then, have left to us a picture of that moorland village which might have rivalled *Cranford*, for there was the same genial atmosphere to be found in Haworth as in Cranford, though it was needful to live with the people to find it. Knutsford had another side to its character, but Mrs. Gaskell's talent for seeing the best side ignored it. At Haworth—not very long

after Miss Brontë's death—the prototype of Miss Matty and more than one Miss Pole might have been found. There was the same absence of boasting about wealth that characterised Cranford; economy was not only considered "elegant" in Haworth, but essential, and thrift was a virtue which almost everybody practised. Consequently, there were few really poor people in the village. In cases of sickness or distress, the rich were always eager to help the poor, and the natives were kind and hospitable. Mrs. Gaskell's task in attempting to describe the Brontë household was an extremely difficult one. Methodism had taken a firm hold of the neighbourhood, and Dissenters, exercising their rights as parishioners, constituted a disturbing influence in the affairs of the Haworth Church. There had been serious trouble when Mr. Brontë came to the living, and the peculiarities and eccentricities of the family were a constant theme of village gossip. Their extraordinary gifts and failings were both magnified, and the seclusion in which the Brontë home was shrouded gave rise to many stories, in which fiction was more abundant than fact. The story is still current in Haworth that Branwell Brontë could write two different letters, one with each hand, at the same time, whilst dictating a third. Under these circumstances, it is not difficult to understand the serious error which Mrs. Gaskell made in accepting, without absolute truth, a story which removed some blame from Branwell Brontë's character by transferring it to another person.

As a mother, Mrs. Gaskell pitied Branwell Brontë, and to a great extent she understood why he went wrong. She knew that it is the clever boys who need the most guidance in youth, and there was no doubt of Branwell Brontë's intellectual ability. What he needed was a strong hand to guide him. She

writes: "His talents were certainly very brilliant, and of this he was fully conscious, and fervently desired, by their use, either in writing or drawing, to make himself a name. . . . He was full of noble impulses, as well as of extraordinary gifts; not accustomed to resist temptation, it is true, from any higher motive than strong family affection, but showing so much power of attachment to all about him, that they took pleasure in believing that, after a time, he would 'right himself,' and that they should have pride and delight in the use he would then make of his splendid talents. His aunt especially made him her great favourite. There are always peculiar trials in the life of an only boy in a family of girls. He is expected to act a part in life; to *do*, while they are only to *be*; and the necessity of their giving way to him in some things is too often exaggerated into their giving way to him in all, and thus rendering him utterly selfish."

Later, Mrs. Gaskell says of the Brontë girls with regard to their brother: "Though he had, they were aware, fallen into some errors, the exact nature of which they avoided knowing, still he was their hope and their darling; their pride, who should some time bring great glory to the name of Brontë."

There are some who think that Mrs. Gaskell was too lenient when drawing her picture of Rev. Patrick Brontë. Others, again, consider that she did not make sufficient allowance for his difficulties, and that the weaknesses in his character were magnified. If De Quincey had been the biographer, the Brontë story would have been much less favourable than it was. Here are De Quincey's views of the Brontës:

"The Brontës, meaning the girls, had some very noble features in their characters, but not many that were amiable. The males of the family were scamps.

Think of this—the elder scamp (Papa, I mean) always dined alone, like the savages in so many regions, and even Mahometan barbarians, whose wives eat apart from (or perhaps after) their tyrants. Now what excuse did the 'leathery Herr Papa' make for this practice? Why (says Mrs. Gaskell) his stomach being peculiarly delicate, it became requisite that he should not be tempted away by a wider and miscellaneous choice from his own simple diet. Simple! So then his daughters no doubt had a luxurious—a tempting table. Now elsewhere it comes out—that these poor girls, who through life were models of self-denying abstinence, had mere plain potatoes for dinner, without any animal accompaniment, and I believe without any seasoning or sauce. Condiment is pedantic. One after one, in regular succession, the three younger girls—(1) Charlotte, (2) Emily, (3) Anne—were turned out of doors to get their own bread in a far worse service, to my thinking, than that of a housemaid; for surely it is better by much to go down on to one's knees to scour the front door-steps, with the prospect at night of creeping to an undisturbed bed, in humble respectability, than to make one in a crowd of most vulgar Belgian girls; generally vicious, inquisitive, scandalous, spiteful, silly and ignoble, gathered into one huge dormitory."

CHAPTER XV

SILVERDALE

THE Village of Silverdale—Lindeth Farm—The Novelist's Habit of Early Rising—Her Pathetic Stories—References to Silverdale in *Ruth*—Deepdale Pool—The Cove, Silverdale—*The Sexton's Hero*—Crossing the Sands at Silverdale—Friends in the Lake District—The Sheiling, Silverdale.

MRS. GASKELL was not a strong woman, and although she often gave strangers an impression of robust health by her vitality and enthusiasm, this was owing more to an optimistic disposition, coupled with strong will power, that enabled her to accomplish twice as much work as most women. Quite early in her married life she found the hard and somewhat monotonous experience of a minister's wife in Manchester very trying, and a holiday often saved her from a serious breakdown. Fortunately she was able to get away to Silverdale, an ideal spot about seventy miles from Manchester. There, with her young family and faithful nurse, Hearn, she would go in the hot summer months, when smoky Manchester was almost unbearable. This little village was a veritable city of refuge to Mrs. Gaskell in the days when literary work occupied much of her time.

Silverdale is on the shores of Morecambe Bay, and no more restful spot could be found on the West Coast. Whilst Morecambe has become a flourishing and popular holiday town for the trippers and toilers from Lancashire and Yorkshire, Silverdale, only a few miles away, has retained much of its natural beauty, with the attraction of a pretty seaside village, besides being

situated in a real bit of charming country. It appears at its best in the Spring, when the lilies of the valley are so abundant as to cause it to be named "lily-land." It is quite an old-world place, such as Mrs. Gaskell always loved, and its beauty grows upon one as it becomes familiar. A few farms dotted here and there in the straggling village, a group of cottages, a few small shops, the new village church—built since Mrs. Gaskell lived there—a post office from which the letters had to be fetched in her days, one or two lonely inns, together with a few modern villas built by wealthy Manchester merchants, complete the view which the village presents to a visitor. There are no pierrots, promenades, or piers.

To a stranger, the most striking feature is the Gibraltar Tower, about a quarter of a mile from the shore, which serves as a landmark for miles around, and is often mistaken for a church tower. It was built by a Mr. Preston, of Manchester, and was known in its early days as Lindeth Tower, the name Lindeth being common in the village and attached to many houses, such as Lindeth Farm, Lindeth Lodge, and Lindeth House. The farm is now known as Gibraltar Farm. The tower stands in the uncultivated grounds attached to the farm, in which is an old sun-dial. In Mrs. Gaskell's time, what is now allowed to be waste land was a garden.

The tower is plain and square, and four storeys high. The ground-floor is used as a kitchen, the first and second are bedrooms, and the highest is a sitting-room, with an iron staircase leading to the flat roof. When staying at Silverdale, Mrs. Gaskell made this sitting-room, in which Carlyle would have revelled, her study. On a clear day, the view from its two windows is magnificent—Morecambe Bay, stretching away to the Cumberland Hills, with the wide expanse

LINDETH FARM

LINDETH TOWER, SILVERDALE

of sands at low tide, the sea at other times washing the foot of the heather-clad hills. The white sails of the little yachts gleam in the distance, and the black posts referred to in *Ruth* stand up in the sands, serving as guides to the fishermen. From the top of the tower, the sunsets at times are gorgeous in the extreme, and when darkness has settled on this lovely shore, there are the lurid lights from the furnaces at Carnforth, four miles away, and the distant lamps from the promenade and pier at Morecambe reflected in the sea.

Mrs. Gaskell always found this spot inspiring and invigorating, and she considered herself fortunate to have discovered such a unique place, ready prepared for her. Here she repaired to plot and write her stories, alone with her thoughts, with nothing to break the stillness except the sound of the wind and the sea. Many of her books were "born" in this tower, and probably parts of all of them were written here, except, perhaps, *Wives and Daughters*.

The family who lived at the farm across the tower garden often spoke of Mrs. Gaskell's habit of early rising. Some time before the labourers were at work in the summer months, she would be writing in her bedroom; occasionally she was known to be at work before the dawn. Never a good sleeper, and with an active and imaginative brain, she employed these early hours in writing or putting down notes for future use, and her morning thoughts were always best.

Those who knew her well were always aware of the writing of any pathetic incident of her stories without any reference by Mrs. Gaskell, though they did not probe for particulars until she was prepared to give them. Like Dickens, she made the sorrows of her heroines her own, and as Dickens walked the

streets of Paris, weeping for the death of Little Nell so Mrs. Gaskell felt the sorrows of poor Ruth and cried over the sad trials of her starving Manchester characters in *Mary Barton*. She never enjoyed reading her pathetic stories after they were published, for they had cost her much to write, and were often associated with actual lives which she had known and pitied with a true mother's great heart, always full of love towards the erring and the unfortunate. In a letter to Ruskin, she confessed that *Cranford* was the only one of her books that she could bear to read over and over again. From this beautiful story she drew amusement, comfort, and solace when ill or depressed, revelling in the scenes of her girlhood when "fancy free" she met the fascinating characters which have made *Cranford* a classic, capable of holding its own among the books written by women writers of the Victorian era.

This sequestered little bit of coast is described in one of the guide-books of a neighbouring town as "a place blessed in having no history." But this is surely the jealousy of a rival seaside resort, for Silverdale has associations of both historic and prehistoric interest. There are many evidences of the Ice Age, and in the fields around are still to be seen huge boulders which have been brought down by glaciers. One of these boulders is of great interest to scientists. It stands thirteen feet high, is estimated to weigh eighty tons, and is poised on another stone embedded in the rock. Then there is the great "Trough," a natural limestone gorge, where the natives hid whole herds of cattle in the time of the Pict Raids. There is also the beautiful Deepdale Pool, which Mrs. Gaskell describes so graphically in *Ruth*, although in the story it is associated with North Wales. It is the spot where Bellingham decks Ruth's hair with water lilies, and

exclaims : " There, Ruth ! now you'll do. Come and look at yourself in the pond." Ruth's thoughts are characteristic of Mrs. Gaskell during her maidenhood :

" She could not help seeing her own loveliness ; it gave her a sense of satisfaction for an instant, as the sight of any other beautiful object would have done, but she never thought of associating it with herself. She knew that she was beautiful, but that seemed abstract and removed from herself. Her existence was in feeling and thinking and loving."

Deepdale Pool and the surrounding scenery is not just as it was in Mrs. Gaskell's time, when it was a favourite spot for her family picnics. Silverdale was the old home of Alice Wilson before she went to Manchester, as described in *Mary Barton :*

" ' Was it a pretty place ? ' ' Pretty, lass ! I never seed such a bonny bit anywhere . . . near our cottage were rocks ! . . . Ye don't know what rocks are in Manchester ! Grey pieces o' stone as large as a house, all covered over wi' mosses of different colours, some yellow, some brown ; and the ground beneath them knee-deep in purple heather, smelling sae sweet and fragrant, and the low music of the humming-bee for ever sounding among it.' "

This is true of Silverdale to-day. Here is Mrs. Gaskell's description of the pool as it was in the " fifties " :

" The path they chose led to a wood on the side of a hill, and they entered, glad of the shade of the trees. At first, it appeared like any common grove, but they soon came to a deep descent, on the summit of which they stood, looking down on the tree-tops, which were softly waving far beneath their feet There was a path, leading sharp down, and they followed it ; the ledge of rock made it almost like going down steps, and their walk grew into a bounding,

and their bounding into a run, before they reached the lowest plane. A green gloom reigned there ; it was the still hour of noon : the little birds were quiet in some leafy shade. They went on a few yards, and then they came to a circular pool overshadowed by the trees, whose highest boughs had been beneath their feet a few minutes before. The pond was hardly below the surface of the ground, and there was nothing like a bank on any side. A heron was standing there motionless, but when he saw them, he flapped his wings and slowly rose, and soared above the green heights of the wood up into the very sky itself, for at that depth the trees appeared to touch the round, white clouds which brooded over the earth. The speedwell grew in the shallowest water on the pool, and all around its margin, but the flowers were hardly seen at first, so deep was the green shadow cast by the trees. In the very middle of the pond the sky was mirrored clear, and dark, a blue which looked as if a black void lay behind."

Abermouth in *Ruth* is undoubtedly Silverdale. Mrs. Gaskell describes Lindeth Farm in *Ruth* under the name of Eagle's Crag, which is a composite picture of the farm and a house called The Cove :

" The front and back doors of the house were on two sides at right angles to each other. They (Ruth and her pupils) all shrunk a little from the idea of going in at the front door . . . they went through the quiet farmyard, right into the bright, ruddy kitchen. . . . Ruth went up the old awkward back-stairs, and into the room they were to sit in. . . . It was a large house built on the summit of a rock, which nearly overhung the shore below, and there was, to be sure, a series of zigzag tacking paths down the face of this rock, but from the house they could not be seen."

The latter part is the description of The Cove, the seaside residence of Mr. Brocklehurst, where Charlotte Brontë stayed as a little girl. Later on, Mrs. Gaskell describes Lindeth Farm much as it is to-day with a dining-room, a drawing-room, but no third room for the governess and her charge. This old farm has had an additional kitchen built on to it, but otherwise it is just as Mrs. Gaskell describes it. There are two other houses close by, in which she spent occasional holidays, but the farm and the fields leading down to the rocks on the beach were those connected with the story of *Ruth* and her pupils.

During Ruth's stay at Abermouth, we get glimpses of Mrs. Gaskell when she was just entering womanhood, and snatches of conversation which came to her ears are repeated in favour of her heroine.

" ' Yes, I know I am pretty. I could not help knowing it, for many people have told me so,' says Ruth, in reply to her friend's remark, ' You are the prettiest ' ; and Bellingham's description after he had met her on the sands at Abermouth : ' Her face was positively Greek; and then such a proud, superb turn of her head : quite queenly. She might be a Percy or a Howard for the grandeur of her grace.' "

There are descriptions of the weather associated with Silverdale, that probably owe something to the Brontës, for they are suggestive of Charlotte Brontë's descriptions, and as Charlotte Brontë read through the proof sheets of *Ruth,* she may have recognised them as akin to hers :

" She threw her body half out of the window into the cold night air. The wind was rising, and came in great gusts. The rain beat down on her. It did her good. A still, calm night would not have soothed her as this did. The wild, tattered clouds, hurrying past the moon, gave her a foolish kind of pleasure

that made her smile a vacant smile. The blast-driven rain came on her again, and drenched her hair through and through. The words 'stormy wind fulfilling His word' came into her mind."

The meeting of Ruth and Mr. Donne (*alias* Bellingham) took place on the Abermouth sands, which those who know Silverdale can locate as the spot opposite The Cove. There are still to be seen "The black posts, which, rising above the heaving waters, marked where the fishermen's nets were laid"; and it was on these sands in front of The Cove that Ruth resisted the temptation to go and live with Bellingham again.

There are few places that have more gorgeous sunsets than Silverdale, with the purple Cumberland Hills forming a rich setting to the flaming Western skies. Mrs. Gaskell mentions this, after the scene on the sands; and as parts of *Ruth* were written at Silverdale, it is not surprising that the scenery is used in describing Ruth's stay at Abermouth:

"Ruth forgot herself in looking at the gorgeous sight. She sat up gazing, and, as she gazed, the tears dried on her cheeks, and, somehow, all human care and sorrow were swallowed up in the unconscious sense of God's infinity. The sunset calmed her more than any words, however wise and tender, could have done. It even seemed to give her strength and courage; she did not know how or why, but so it was."

Writing of the troubles of Mary Barton, when at Silverdale in the summer of 1845 or 1846, Mrs. Gaskell says: "There was little sympathy in the outward scene, with the internal trouble. All was so still, so motionless, so hard! Very different to this lovely night in the country in which I am now writing, where the distant horizon is soft and undulating in

the moonlight, and the nearer trees sway gently to and fro in the night-wind with something of almost human motion; and the rustling air makes music among their branches, as if speaking soothingly to the weary ones, who lie awake in heaviness of hearts. The sights and sounds of such a night lull pain and grief to rest."

One of Mrs. Gaskell's short stories, *The Sexton's Hero*, is a tale of these treacherous, shifting sands in Morecambe Bay.

This short story deserves to be better known, for it is a tale of bravery and self-sacrifice. It is most probably founded on fact, for before the Furness Railway was opened in 1864 along this coast, it was the common and much nearer way to cross the sands at low water, as it saved about twenty miles of difficult journey by the coast. There was an old coach way across the bay from Silverdale to Kent's Bank. An official guide was provided by the Government to escort parties across, but venturesome travellers would sometimes attempt the journey without his aid, and there are many stories still told in the district of those who have been swallowed up either by the shifting sands or the incoming tide. Stories of this part of the Lake country abound in thrilling disasters, which occurred at dates very near to the time when Mrs. Gaskell wrote *The Sexton's Hero*, and her imaginative brain would have no difficulty in weaving this story of these dangerous Lancashire sands.

The old parish church at Silverdale, where Mrs. Gaskell worshipped when a visitor, has been replaced by a new one built in 1886, and dedicated to St. John. The old church erected in 1829 still remains, and is used as a mortuary chapel, and the churchyard still serves as the parochial burial ground.

The Sexton's Hero was written as a holiday story at Silverdale, and it opens with a pretty picture of Mrs. Gaskell, with her daughters and friends, resting:

"The afternoon sun shed down his glorious rays on the grassy churchyard, making the shadow, cast by the old yew tree under which we sat, seem deeper and deeper by contrast. The everlasting hum of myriads of summer insects made luxurious lullaby. Of the view that lay beneath our gaze, I cannot speak adequately," says Mrs. Gaskell. "The foreground was the grey stone wall of the vicarage garden; rich in the colouring made by innumerable lichens, ferns, ivy of most tender green and most delicate tracery, and the vivid scarlet of the crane's-bill, which found a home in every nook and crevice—and at the summit of that old wall flaunted some unpruned tendrils of the vine, and long, flower-laden branches of the climbing rose-tree, trained against the inner side. Beyond, lay meadow green and mountain grey, and the blue dazzle of Morecambe Bay, as it sparkled between us and the more distant view.

"For a while we were silent, living in sight and murmuring sound. . . . It is one of the luxuries of holiday-time that thoughts are not rudely shaken from us by outward violence of hurry and busy impatience, but fall maturely from our lips in the sunny leisure of our days. . . .

"My idea of a hero is one who acts up to the highest idea of duty he has been able to form, no matter at what sacrifice. I think by this definition, we may include all phases of character, even to the heroes of old, whose sole (and to us, low) idea of duty consisted in personal prowess."

An eavesdropper in the person of the village sexton joins the group in the Silverdale churchyard, and he is the narrator of the tale of *The Sexton's Hero*. The

hero was a brave fellow who had loved the girl who afterwards became the wife of the sexton, and at the cost of his own life had saved his rival and his wife. The girl had refused the sexton's rival, because she thought him cowardly, as he would not fight. His answer to the challenge : " ' I cannot fight, because I think it is wrong to quarrel and use violence,' " meets with jeers and taunts from his companions, and he loses his sweetheart as a result.

About a year after the marriage of the sexton, he and his wife crossed the dangerous sands in a borrowed shandry to attend his sister's wedding at Lindale, a pretty spot across the bay, hoping to get a safe return between the tides. They were late in starting to make the return journey, and the old mare would not or could not hurry.

The novelist makes the fearful dangers of that crossing very real. The reader is made to feel anxious that the party shall reach the shore in safety :

" ' Lord ! how I did whip the poor mare, to make the most of the red light as yet lasted. . . . From Bolton side, where we started from, it is better than six miles to Cart Lane, and two channels to cross, let alone holes and quicksands. At the second channel from us the guide waits, all during crossing-time from sunrise to sunset ; but for the three hours on each side high water, he's not there, in course. He stays after sunset, if he's forespoken, not else. So now you know where we were that awful night. For we'd crossed the first channel about two mile, and it were growing darker and darker above and around us, all but one red line of light above the hills, when we came to a hollow (for all the sands look so flat, there's many a hollow in them where you lose all sight of the shore). We were longer than we should ha' been in crossing the hollow, the sand was so quick ; and when

we came up again, there, again the blackness, was the white line of the rushing tide coming up the bay! It looked not a mile from us; and when the wind blows up the bay, it comes swifter than a galloping horse. "Lord, help us!" said I. . . .'

"'By this time the mare was all in a lather, and trembling and panting, as if in mortal fright; for, though we were on the last bank afore the second channel, the water was gathering up her legs; and she so tired out! When we came close to the channel she stood still, and not all my flogging could get her to stir; she fairly groaned aloud, and shook in a terrible, quaking way. . . . I pulled out my knife to spur on the old mare, that it might end one way or the other, for the water was stealing sullenly up to the very axle-tree, let alone the white waves that knew no mercy in their steady advance. That one quarter of an hour, sir, seemed as long as all my life since.'"

And then help is at hand. His former rival approaches on horseback:

"'Just as I'd gotten my knife out, another sound was close upon us, blending with the gurgle of the near waters, and the roar of the distant (not so distant though); we could hardly see, but we thought we saw something black against the deep lead colour of wave, and mist, and sky. It neared and neared: with slow, steady motion, it came across the channel right to where we were. Oh, God! it was Gilbert Dawson on his strong bay horse. . . . "Quick!" said he, clear and firm. "You must ride before her, and keep her up. The horse can swim. By God's mercy, I will follow."'"

Gilbert Dawson fails to reach the shore and is drowned, and his rival and the woman he loved are saved by his noble self-sacrifice.

Mrs. Gaskell does not hesitate to give the correct

names of all the places mentioned in this story, except the one of the place in which it was written, which was her "seaside home" at Silverdale. Morecambe Bay, Grange, Lindal, Arnside Knot, Flukeborough, all within a short distance and all familiar to the Gaskells, are mentioned.

This chat with the sexton is quite in keeping with Mrs. Gaskell's method of gathering the materials for her story. Old parish churches, from the time when she lived under the shadow of Shakespeare's Church at Stratford-on-Avon, had a strange fascination for her, and she often found the sexton a reliable narrator of bygone local events.

Mrs. Gaskell was anxious, in the early days of her literary work, to have a house at or near Silverdale, but none seemed quite suitable; and, later, she decided to buy one at Holybourne, in Hants, where the winter climate was milder. Silverdale may be considered as one of the gateways to the Lake Country, a district that, as we have seen, had attractions for Mrs. Gaskell. She visited the Lake poets, and admired and valued both Southey and Wordsworth. Mrs. Tyler, the aunt of Southey, is said to figure in *Cranford*, and Dorothy Wordsworth, with her devotion to her brother, was a type of woman Mrs. Gaskell greatly esteemed. Coleridge she had heard much of from her friends, the Wedgwoods. It is well known that Josiah Wedgwood and his brother Thomas each contributed seventy-five pounds a year to Coleridge as an annuity, in order to leave him free to write.

Ruskin's home at Brantwood was open to welcome Mrs. Gaskell, and she sent many a devotee of his, with a note of introduction, which Ruskin was always glad to honour. Bishop Phillips Brooks on his first tour to England visited Brantwood, arriving with a

kindly note of introduction from the author of *Cranford*. Arnold, of Rugby, was another friend associated with the English Lake district. Both he and his wife often welcomed Mrs. Gaskell at Fox How. Near by is Fox Ghyll, the house where W. E. Forster lived for a time; both Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were his supporters, and Mr. Forster greatly admired *Mary Barton* before he knew who had written it. There is one other friend who deserves to be mentioned—Sir John Richardson, the Arctic explorer. His wife was the daughter of Mrs. Fletcher, the Edinburgh friend of the novelist's father. His home was in the Vale of Easedale, near Grasmere, the centre of almost all the beautiful and interesting places within a radius of a dozen miles. It is not to be wondered at that this beautiful district gave Mrs. Gaskell inspiration, for it held memories of so many who had fought and won in the field of literature.

Lindeth Tower and Lindeth Farm are not the only places which are associated with the Gaskells in Silverdale, for Mrs. Gaskell's oft-repeated wish, "Oh, for a house in the country," has been carried out by her two unmarried daughters. Faithful to the memory of their mother, they have kept the old house at Plymouth Grove much as it was in her days, and they have also carried out her long-cherished wish by building a beautiful cottage on the high ground at Silverdale. They have given to it the name of "The Sheiling." The view from the upper drawing-room window looks out on a beautiful bit of scenery, with Hawes Tarn gleaming in the distance and Arnside Tower on the opposite side. Here and there in the fields may be seen the huge stones, which have stood there since the days when Silverdale was a great morass in prehistoric times.

The house stands about four hundred yards from

the road, and is approached through a veritable bit of wild woodland, which has been left to grow naturally, except for the path which has been cut through. "We prefer it so," said Mrs. Gaskell's youngest daughter. This restful country home on the shores of Morecambe Bay is just such a cottage as Mrs. Gaskell would have loved, and her daughters, in making their seaside home there, have kept in touch with the cherished memories of their earliest days, when they spent so many happy holidays with their parents. When staying in Silverdale, Mrs. Gaskell used to hire a pony and carriage, and take drives round the district to Arnside, Beetham, Levens Hall, and the many pretty places near by. Silverdale is proud to have been associated with Mrs. Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë, and both names appear in the local guide book. "The Sheiling" will probably be left as a "Home of Rest" for teachers from the Manchester High School for Girls, or for convalescents from Miss Gaskell's private nursing home in Plymouth Grove, and so this cottage by the sea will become a memorial to the one woman writer of the Victorian era, who will always be distinct from many of her contemporaries as having known the divine joy of motherhood, which gave her an advantage in writing of women and children, and made her gentler and more sympathetic with erring humanity.

CHAPTER XVI

PLYMOUTH GROVE

(1857)

ELLEN NUSSEY'S Visit to Plymouth Grove—Her Connection with the Brontë Biography—Mrs. Gaskell Edits *Mabel Vaughan*—Visit to Italy—Accident on the Boat—*A Dark Night's Work*—Reception of the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*—Libel Actions Threatened—Steps taken by the Publishers—The Author's Apology in the *Times*—A Vindication of the Clergy Daughters' School—Views of Charles Kingsley, George Eliot and Others—Popularity of the Work—*Life of Madame de Sévigné*—Reasons for the Popularity of the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

THE opening of the year 1857 found Mrs. Gaskell busy finishing the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Ellen Nussey, the most intimate friend that Miss Brontë ever had, was invited to Plymouth Grove for a week. Nothing proves so conclusively Mrs. Gaskell's anxiety to give a true and faithful biography, for there was no one more capable of helping in the task than Ellen Nussey. That she believed all to be true that Mrs. Gaskell wrote is evident, for she had the opportunity of correcting not only the manuscript, but also the proofs. The charge brought against Mrs. Gaskell of not having had the book carefully revised before sending it to press cannot be substantiated. Afterwards, when Miss Nussey was accused of having helped to spread the slander over Branwell Brontë's miserable doings, she replied that she did have the proofs sent on to her, but that as Mrs. Gaskell wrote begging her to forward them as early as possible, she had not sufficient time to look them over. She further stated that of her

letters from Charlotte Brontë, she had authorised Mrs. Gaskell to use only those which illustrated the actual life of her friend, and that these did not include the information regarding Branwell Brontë.

It is certain, however, that Miss Nussey believed that Mrs. Gaskell was telling the true story about Branwell, and that she acquiesced in the telling of it. There is no doubt that Mrs. Gaskell considered that Charlotte's account to Miss Nussey contained the truth about Branwell's downfall.

Shortly after finishing the "Life," Mrs. Gaskell, by arrangement with the author, Miss Cummins, an American writer, edited *Mabel Vaughan*, and wrote a preface to the book, which was published in England by Messrs. Sampson Low & Co. In this preface, Mrs. Gaskell expresses the hope that England and America may be joined in bonds of love and sympathy by means of the books written by American and English authors, being both "of one hand and heart."

In accordance with her usual custom of going for a holiday as soon as she had finished reading the proofs of the book in hand, Mrs. Gaskell, together with her two elder daughters and Miss Catherine Winkworth, started in February, 1857, for Rome. They stopped at Paris to visit Madame Mohl, from whom Mrs. Gaskell always received a cordial welcome; then they went to Marseilles, and on by sea to Civita Vecchia. An alarming accident, caused by the bursting of the boilers, shortly after the voyage had begun, necessitated their return to Marseilles, and Mr. Gaskell was much concerned at not hearing of the arrival of his wife and daughters at Civita Vecchia at the time expected. The account of this accident is graphically told in *A Dark Night's Work.*

Whilst in Rome, Mrs. Gaskell and her daughters were the guests of William Wetmore Story, the

American poet and sculptor. They spent Holy Week in Rome, and returned by Florence, visiting Mr. and Mrs. Browning, whom Mrs. Gaskell had previously met. It is recorded that at one of these meetings Mrs. Gaskell talked Mr. Browning to sleep, which may account for Sally's remark in *Ruth* after accomplishing a similar feat : " 'I thought I had lost one of my gifts, if I could not talk a body to sleep.' " They arrived in England in time for the Art Exhibition in Manchester. The summer was a very busy one, and Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell had many distinguished guests staying at Plymouth Grove. At this exhibition Mrs. Gaskell was much lionised, and she thoroughly enjoyed the part of cicerone, which she played to perfection. Both Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were considered good judges of paintings, and Miss Meta Gaskell, who had had painting lessons from Ruskin, excelled as an artist.

Whilst Mrs. Gaskell was absent on her Rome tour, the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* was published. It received a very favourable reception, a second edition being very quickly called for, and then a third. But trouble was brewing from many quarters. Mr. Brontë wrote a kind and affectionate letter, but complained of some inaccuracies as to the feeding of his children, saying that he had never restricted them to vegetable food. Mr. Nicholls—Charlotte Brontë's husband—was not pleased, because he thought that Mrs. Gaskell implied that he was not the most sympathetic of husbands, and the servants at Haworth Vicarage were up in arms on finding themselves described as wasteful after Mrs. Brontë's death.

Mr. Brontë and Mr. Nicholls made light of their grievances, but the old vicarage servants, Nancy and Sarah Garrs, were much upset, and obtained a certificate from old Mr. Brontë stating that they were

kind to his children, honest, and not wasteful. This certificate, in Mr. Brontë's handwriting, may be seen in the Brontë Museum at Haworth. The Haworth people resented the character which Mrs. Gaskell had given them, and one family objected to the account given of the betrayal of their daughter. All these were not difficult to explain. But more serious trouble came from the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge, on account of Mrs. Gaskell's version of the treatment of the little Brontë sisters whilst pupils at the school.

The relatives of the Rev. W. Carus-Wilson (the Mr. Brocklehurst of *Jane Eyre*) threatened an action, and much correspondence took place, followed by a pamphlet written by Mr. Carus-Wilson's son-in-law, the Rev. H. Shepheard, M.A., entitled *A Vindication of the Clergy Daughters' School and of the Rev. W. Carus-Wilson from the Remarks in "The Life of Charlotte Brontë."* Mrs. Gaskell, however, defended Charlotte Brontë's statements tenaciously, and after the "vindication," the matter was allowed to drop.

It is somewhat interesting to find in the British Museum a volume of biographical tracts, the first of which is "A sermon for Milton's death-day, preached at Cross Street Chapel by the Rev. William Gaskell, M.A., and published by request." The text of the sermon is: "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance" (Ps. cxii. 6).

The second tract is the *Vindication* by the Rev. H. Shepheard, M.A., incumbent of Casterton. In this tract Mrs. Gaskell is severely censured. The most serious result of her alleged inaccuracies was the threat of a libel action by Mrs. Robinson, of Thorpe Green, because of the novelist's reference to her in connection with Branwell Brontë's downfall. All this caused much trouble and anxiety. Mr. Gaskell, who

had to deal with the matter whilst his wife was away, hurried off to Haworth to make enquiries, and found that some of the statements complained of were fabrications. Mrs. Gaskell says that on her return from the Continent she found herself "in a veritable hornets' nest"; but though it is easy to blame her for indiscretion, it must always be remembered that she was acting as she thought on righteous lines. In her pity for Branwell Brontë, she sought to transfer some of the blame to those whom she considered to be the cause of his downfall. As Anne Brontë had been governess at Thorpe Green when Branwell was there, and she believed his version, it was inevitable that Charlotte Brontë should pass on, in all good faith, the same version to Mrs. Gaskell.

From many quarters Mrs. Gaskell received lavish and unstinted praise. On the publication of the "Life," Charles Kingsley wrote: "You have had a delicate and a great work to do, and you have done it admirably. Be sure that the book will do good." George Eliot says of the "Life": "We thought it admirable; we cried over it and felt the better for it."

In this story, which "reads like a Greek tragedy," to quote M. Ampère, Mrs. Gaskell put a full year's hard work, and we have striking testimony to its universal popularity in the statement, which has never been refuted, that more copies of this biography have been sold than of any other, not forgetting Boswell's *Life of Johnson* or Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. Critics have assumed that it was the controversy which raged for a time round the first and second editions, resulting in an apology from Mrs. Gaskell to the Robinson family, printed in the *Times* in 1857, in the withdrawal of all unsold copies, and in the slight alterations made in the third edition, which caused the novelist to resolve never to have her own

"Life" published. On the authority of her own daughters, however, this is not so. Had there been no adverse criticism, Mrs. Gaskell would have objected to the writing of her own life, because she was so sensitive and shrank from all publicity. Her feeling was akin to that of Thackeray, who wished his works to be the only record of his life.

It is also a mistake to say that the pain and anxiety brought upon her by her biography of Charlotte Brontë led her to abandon all intentions of writing any other biographies. At the time of her death, she and her daughter Meta had collected a large amount of material with a view to writing the life of Madame de Sevigné, much on the same lines as the *Life of Madame Récamier*, by Madame Mohl. Far from regretting that she had written the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, Mrs. Gaskell rejoiced in the work, and was just as proud of it as of her own novels.

Some writers have gone so far as to say that Mrs. Gaskell was not capable of appreciating to the full the novels of Charlotte Brontë, but if ever the letters which Mrs. Gaskell wrote to Charlotte Brontë are published, the world will know how justly the author of *Cranford* estimated those works of genius which few at that time were able to appreciate at their right value.

Mrs. Gaskell wrote her stories with a purpose, and the one biography to which her name is attached had likewise a definite end in view: "the great purpose of making *her* known and valued as one who had gone through such a terrible life with a brave and faithful heart." It is well to remember the peculiar difficulties which Mrs. Gaskell had to encounter. In writing her novels, she had been able to command the characters at will, for, as she wrote, "I do think I've a talent for fiction; it is so pleasant to invent and

make the incidents dovetail together ; . . . but I am afraid I enjoy not being fettered by truth."

In this *Life of Charlotte Brontë* she was not only " fettered by truth," but by truth that was, indeed, " stranger than fiction." That she should have accomplished her work so well and given such a true and faithful picture of the author of *Jane Eyre* is surely a matter for hearty congratulation, for it is owing to her wonderful intuition, indomitable energy, and patient research, together with a sense of deep responsibility in the task she had undertaken, that we know Charlotte Brontë so well, not only as a writer, but as a good and conscientious woman. " I did so try to tell the truth," wrote Mrs. Gaskell to one of her friends after the " Life " was published. " I weighed every line with my whole power and heart, so that every line should go to its great purpose of making *her* known and valued."

For clear understanding of the subject, for just appreciation, for faithful delineation of character, Mrs. Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë stands out as a great tribute of love, admiration and justice paid by one woman to another. It was a great task, and it needed a woman with " the seeing eye and the understanding heart " to comprehend a life so different from others. Mrs. Gaskell revealed the real Charlotte Brontë, and it is safe to affirm that no other woman of that day could have done it half so well. It is not to be wondered at that Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, after reading it, should express the hope that Mr. Nicholls would rejoice that his wife would be known as " a Christian heroine, who could bear her cross with the firmness of a martyr saint."

It is to Mrs. Gaskell that we are indebted for the account of the religious and ethical side of Charlotte Brontë's character. Cruel statements had been made

concerning the author of *Jane Eyre*. She had been accused of writing "naughty books," and the lacerating review of *Jane Eyre* in the *Quarterly Review* had appeared while Charlotte Brontë was passing through the hardest trial of her life—the death of her sister Emily. These facts receive their due treatment at the hands of Mrs. Gaskell. She mentions a conversation at Briery Close with Charlotte Brontë when the subject of women writing fiction was discussed. "I remember her grave, earnest way of saying, 'I trust God will take from me whatever power of invention or expression I may have, before He lets me become blind to the sense of what is fitting or unfitting to be said.'"

It is largely owing to Mrs. Gaskell's pathetic story of the Brontës that their works have gained such a prominence. Their books are read not merely on their merits, but as the productions of three women who had to fight against delicate health, desolate surroundings, and difficult circumstances. Mrs. Gaskell's "Life" excited a pity and a sympathy for the three brave and noble women. There are devotees of the Brontës, who will travel miles to walk over the ground which the Brontës trod, often with a copy of Mrs. Gaskell's "Life" in their hands rather than a Brontë novel.

Happy and serene as Mrs. Gaskell's life had been, she knew what it was to be misunderstood. She was made to suffer for the brave and outspoken words in *Ruth*, although those nearest and dearest to her approved, but she never flinched from following her own lights, although to others they might appear misleading. Some years before Charlotte Brontë's death, Mrs. Gaskell wrote: "People may talk as they will about the little respect that is paid to virtue, unaccompanied by the outward accidents of wealth

or station ; but I rather think it will be found that, in the long run, true and simple virtue always has its proportionate reward in the respect and reverence of everyone whose esteem is worth having. To be sure, it is not rewarded after the way of the world as mere worldly possessions are, with low obeisance and lip service ; but all the better and more noble qualities in the hearts of others make ready and go forth to meet it on its approach, provided only it be pure, simple, and unconscious of its own existence."

This appears in a marked degree in Charlotte Brontë's "Life," and it is her biographer who has given the key to the sterling virtues of the writer of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley*, and *Villette*.

MRS. GASKELL

CHAPTER XVII

PLYMOUTH GROVE

(1858–1860)

THE Novelist's Temporary Distaste for Writing—*My Lady Ludlow*—First Contribution to an American Magazine—Her only Irish Magazine Story: *The Half Brothers*—Visit of Charles Dickens to Manchester—*A Manchester Marriage*—*A Crooked Branch*—*Lois the Witch*—Death of the Rev. William Turner.

THE worry and anxiety caused by the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* certainly gave Mrs. Gaskell a distaste for writing, and during the next two or three years she did not contribute so much to the magazines, and, what is more regrettable, the quality of her writing was not up to her usual standard. This is hardly to be wondered at, knowing how sensitive she always was. Her health was also affected, and it was necessary that she should take more rest. When well, work was a joy to her, but worry of any kind clogged the wheels of industry and prevented her from producing her best.

In 1858 she started *My Lady Ludlow* as a serial in *Household Words*. As has already been mentioned, this is not one of her best stories. Later in the year, she wrote *The Doom of the Griffiths*, which was published in *Harper's Magazine*. This was her first contribution to an American periodical. It is a story of one of her Welsh holidays, and afterwards it was included among *Round the Sofa* stories published in 1859.

In this story the novelist takes her readers to a

lonely valley in North Wales, in which district she and her husband had spent their honeymoon. It was a favourite holiday resort until the death of their only boy. The writer goes back to the time of Henry IV, when the Welsh, under Owen Glendower (Owain Glendwr, as the Welsh spell it), struggled to regain their independence. "When Sir David Gam," as black a traitor as if he had been born in Bluith, "sought to murder Owen at Machynlleth, there was one with him whose name Glendwr little dreamed of having associated with his enemies. Rhys ap Gryfydd, his 'old familiar friend,' his relation, his more than brother, had consented unto his blood. . . . Glendwr was too deeply read in the human heart to kill him. No, he let him live on, the loathing and scorn of his compatriots, and the victim of bitter remorse. The mark of Cain was upon him."

Then the chieftain passed a doom upon him and his race: "'I doom thee to live, because I know thou wilt pray for death. Thou shalt live on beyond the natural term of the life of man, the scorn of all good men. The very children shall point to thee with hissing tongue and say, "There goes one who would have shed a brother's blood!" For I loved thee more than a brother, O Rhys ap Gryfydd! Thou shalt live on to see all of thy house, except the weakling in arms, perish by the sword. Thy race shall be accursed. Each generation shall see their lands melt away like snow; yea, their wealth shall vanish, though they may labour night and day to heap up gold. And when nine generations have passed from the face of the earth, thy blood shall no longer flow in the veins of any human being. In those days the last male of thy race shall avenge me. The son shall slay the father.'" The story centres around the fulfilment of this curse in the ninth generation, when Owen

Griffiths, having quarrelled with his father, pushed him over a rock into the bay, where he was either killed by the fall or drowned in the sea. The struggle in the water between the father and son is told most graphically by Mrs. Gaskell. The words come thick and fast, and the scene is so real that the novelist scarcely stops to make it plain. She enters into the son's feelings, and shows the best side of his nature in the presence of death.

" But Owen knew nothing save that the awful doom seemed even now present. He plunged down ; he dived below the water in search of the body, which had none of the elasticity of life to buoy it up ; he saw his father in those depths ; he clutched at him ; he brought him up and cast him, a dead weight, into the boat ; and, exhausted by the effort, he had begun himself to sink again before he instinctively strove to rise and climb into the boat." In reply to his wife, he exclaims, " ' Neither words nor deeds, but what are decreed can come to pass. I was set to do my work, this hundred years and more. The time waited for me. . . . I have done what was foretold of me for generations. . . . I am the last male of my race, and the son has murdered his father.' "

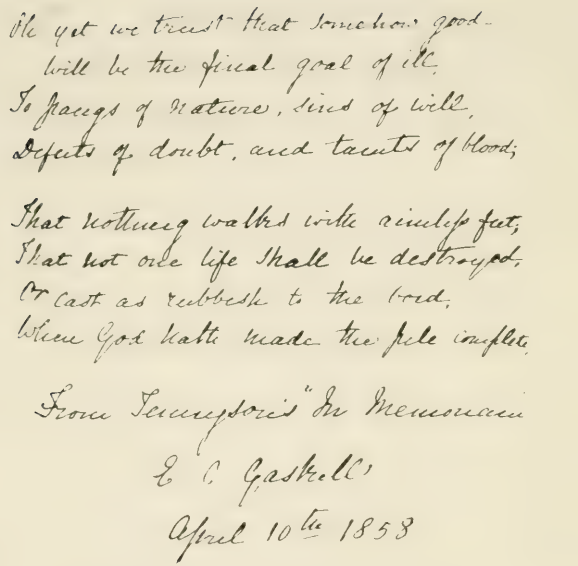
This kind of subject for a story appealed to Mrs. Gaskell. *The Doom of the Griffiths* goes naturally into the same category as *An Accursed Race*, for it is a story of a family which cannot escape a curse, and was probably told to the novelist when visiting the lonely valleys of North Wales, a district noted for its ghost stories, curses, and charms, and the ideal abode of the fairies both good and bad. In the days when Mrs. Gaskell visited North Wales, it was not such a well-known holiday resort as it is to-day. Tourists were few, and there was little accommodation except at the small Welsh inns ; but the place

teemed with traditions of the past, and the natives in those days had time to tell the weird stories of the Principality. Now, these places which Mrs. Gaskell mentions in the *Doom of the Griffiths*—Criccieth, Port Madoc, and Rhyl—are flourishing watering-places invaded by the trippers from Lancashire and Cheshire, who go for an enjoyable holiday, and quite ignore the tales which have lingered for so long, but are now passing into oblivion, amongst these old Welsh villages.

In this short story Mrs. Gaskell brings in the redeeming influence of marriage, and the softening ministry of a little child. This was a subject which she had constantly in mind; she has been called "a match-maker to the core," but her own happy married life led her to wish that every girl should find a good husband and experience the divine blessing of motherhood.

In her description of the improvement in Nest Pritchard, the wife of Owen Griffiths, she says: "How often do we see giddy, coquetting, restless girls become sobered by marriage? A great object in life is decided, one on which their thoughts have been running in all their vagaries: and they seem to verify the beautiful fable of Undine. A new soul beams out in the gentleness and repose of their future lives. An indescribable softness and tenderness takes the place of the wearying vanity of their former endeavours to attract admiration. Something of this sort happened to Nest Pritchard. . . . Her greetings were abounding in delicately-expressed love; her study of his tastes unwearying, in the arrangement of her dress, her time, her very thoughts."

The last member of the family of Owen Griffiths and his wife "sailed away into the tossing darkness, and were never more seen of men." Thus the Doom


Ye yet we trust that somehow good
will be the final goal of ill,
To pangs of nature, sins of will,
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;
That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete.
From Tennyson's "In Memoriam"
E. C. Gaskell
April 10th 1858

FACSIMILE OF MRS. GASKELL'S WRITING
(*reduced*)

of the Griffiths was fulfilled. " The house of Bodowen has sunk into damp, dark ruins; and a Saxon stranger holds the lands of the Griffiths."

The last story which is supposed to be told round Mrs. Dawson's sofa in the drawing-room in Edinburgh before the Monday " at homes " come to an end is *The Half-Brothers*. This tale first appeared in 1858, in the *Dublin University Magazine*. The remorse which lasts until the death-bed, caused by injustice, cruelty, and unkindness, has been preached by Mrs. Gaskell in more than one of her stories. Nothing roused her so much as lack of pity for the deserving and oppressed, whether in the individual, the society, or the nation. The neglected always found in her a champion. The story centres round the farmsteads in the " Fells," not far from Carlisle. It was winter time, and the tragic death in the snow, during one of the storms which often visit this lonely district, is told as a beautiful example of self-sacrifice. No one could appreciate or practise self-sacrifice with more sincerity than the novelist herself, and those who knew her best can tell of her beautiful words from " The Imitation of Christ," which she loved to quote and which she firmly believed :

" That which pleased others, shall go well forward ; that which pleased thee shall not speed."

At the close of 1858, Charles Dickens was in Manchester again, distributing the prizes to the members of the local Mechanics' Institutes in the Free Trade Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were much interested in these mechanics' institutes for the working classes. They were the forerunners of the now popular technical colleges, and many of the working men in the manufacturing districts got the best part of their education at these institutions.

In the following year the novelist contributed

A Manchester Marriage to *Littell's Living Age*, an American magazine, published at Boston. It has been suggested that *A Manchester Marriage* was founded on actual facts connected with an old Manchester family. It was first published in *Household Words* in 1858 and in Boston the following year. The names of the characters—Chadwick, Openshaw, and Wilson—are well known in Manchester. One branch of the Chadwick family lived at Moss Grove Farm, Greenheys, in Mrs. Gaskell's days; the Openshaws gave their name to a suburb of Manchester; and the Wilsons were very well known. Two other short stories published this year were *A Crooked Branch* and *Lois the Witch*, both appearing in *All the Year Round*. *A Crooked Branch* is a well-told story in Mrs. Gaskell's domestic vein. The tale is old-fashioned enough to have a moral for parents who "spare the rod and spoil the child"; and the novelist tells a story better when she has some precept to enforce. Sir Henry Irving once included this story in one of his dramatic readings, and his polished rendering did full justice to the well-defined incidents of the tale. The trial scene, told with a mother's natural sympathy, is one of Mrs. Gaskell's masterpieces.

A Crooked Branch was first published in the Christmas number of *All the Year Round*, where it was included in a series of stories called *The Haunted House*. It is a story of that simple farm life which Mrs. Gaskell could always describe with full knowledge. Memories of her early days at the old farm at Sandlebridge provide local colour for this story, and also for *Cousin Phillis* and *Sylvia's Lovers*.

Mrs. Gaskell once said that *Sylvia's Lovers* was the saddest story she had ever written. If the remark refers merely to her novels, it cannot be disputed; but glancing over the whole range of her fiction, one

must certainly pronounce this tale of *The Crooked Branch* the saddest story of all. The simple wooing by the farmer of Hester Rose (a name which reappears attached to a different character in *Sylvia's Lovers*) is told in true Yorkshire fashion, for the story is said to be of a couple who lived in the North Riding of Yorkshire, and who, marrying late in life, after twenty years of waiting, had no need to go through the preliminaries of courting. " ' Hester, thou dost not mind me. I am Nathan, as thy father turned off at a minute's notice, for thinking of thee for a wife, twenty years come Michaelmas next. I have not thought much upon matrimony since. But Uncle Ben has died, leaving me a small matter in the bank, and I have taken Nab-End Farm, and put in a bit of stock, and shall want a missus to see after it. Wilt like to come ? I'll not mislead thee. It's dairy, and it might have been arable. But arable takes more horses nor it suited me to buy, and I'd the offer of a tidy lot of kine. That's all. If thou'll have me, I'll come for thee as soon as the hay is gotten in.' "

Hester only said : " ' Come in, and sit thee down.' . . . After about twenty minutes . . . he got up, saying, ' Well, Hester, I'm going. When shall I come back again ? ' ' Please thysel and thou'll please me,' said Hester. . . . In another moment, Hester was soundly kissed. . . . ' I have pleased mysel, and thee, too, I hope. . . . I have no time to spend a wooing, and wedding must na take long. Two days is enough to throw away at our time o' life.' "

The couple are married and have one son, who becomes the idol of his parents. They give him a good education, and try to make him superior to the life of a farmer. He goes to London, squanders the good old couple's money, comes back and gets almost all they have saved. Once more he leaves them and

then returns with his accomplices, and tries to get them to murder his parents and steal their last bit of money. The morning of the trial of the would-be murderers comes, and the old farmer and his wife have to give evidence against their only child.

Mrs. Gaskell describes the scene as if she had been present : " The old man's eyes fixed themselves upon his questioner with the look of a creature brought to bay. That look the barrister never forgets. It will haunt him till his dying day." And then comes the pathetic picture of the poor mother before the judge : " Her face worked—her mouth opened two or three times as if to speak—she stretched out her arms imploringly ; but no word came, and she fell back into the arms of those nearest to her. Nathan forced himself forward into the witness-box—

" ' My Lord Judge, a woman bore ye, as I reckon ; it's a cruel shame to serve a mother so. It wur my son, my only child, as called out for us t' open door, and who shouted out for to hold th' oud woman's throat if she did na stop her noise, when hoo'd fain ha' cried for her niece to help. And now yo've truth, and a' th' truth, and I'll leave yo' to th' judgment o' God for th' way yo've getten at it.' "

The novelist's conclusion of this heart-breaking story is pathetic : " Before night the mother was stricken with paralysis, and lay on her death-bed. But the broken-hearted go Home to be comforted of God."

The second story, *Lois the Witch*, has already been referred to in the chapter on Mrs. Gaskell's schooldays.

The novelist was now so well established as a writer, that each year brought its tail of new editions. Two editions of *Round the Sofa and Other Tales* were published, and a new edition of *North and South* appeared, as well as a French edition by Hachette & Co., of Paris. Another Continental publisher, Bernard

Tauchnitz, of Leipzig, issued a two-volume edition of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*; and *The Sexton's Hero* appeared in the first volume of the Parish Magazine.

On Easter Sunday, April 24th, 1859, the Rev. William Turner, Mrs. Gaskell's kind guardian in her Newcastle-on-Tyne days, died at the advanced age of ninety-seven. At the time of his death he was living with his widowed daughter, Mrs. Robberds, his only surviving child, at Lloyd Street, Greenheys, Manchester. Both Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell missed the venerable old minister, who had been so kind a friend and admirer, and whom Mrs. Gaskell's daughters looked upon as an affectionate relative. Mr. Gaskell gave an address over his grave at Upper Brook Street Chapel, Manchester, and preached in Cross Street Chapel his funeral sermon, which was afterwards published by request.

Few ministers have left so long and honourable a record, and in the good Mr. Gray, the clergyman in *My Lady Ludlow* and Thurstan Benson in *Ruth*, Mrs. Gaskell has left a faithful and affectionate tribute to her good friend and relative. Mr. Turner was in his eighty-first year when he retired from Hanover Square Chapel, Newcastle-on-Tyne, and he came straight to Greenheys, Manchester, where he lived for seventeen years. It was characteristic of this good man that when his younger daughter Ann died in 1850, he gave up half the annuity of sixty pounds which his Newcastle-on-Tyne congregation had granted to him, giving as his reason that, owing to his bereavement, he only needed an annuity of thirty pounds.

Mrs. Gaskell spent her summer holidays, in 1859, at Whitby, with her family, and at once began the research and investigation which resulted in the three-volume novel of *Sylvia's Lovers*, which was published in 1863.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHITBY

(1859–1863)

Sylvia's Lovers

MRS. GASKELL'S visit to Whitby—*Sylvia's Lovers*—Gathering Material for the Story—Whitby—Canon Ainger's *Life of Crabbe*—Influence of Crabbe—Press Gang Riots—Du Maurier and Whitby—Whitby and the Whale Fishery—Foster Brothers—Haytersbank Farm—Names in *Sylvia's Lovers*—Whitby Market—Moss Bank—The Sailor's Funeral—Whitby Church—Sylvia and Philip Hepburn—Conclusion of the Story.

IN 1859, Mrs. Gaskell, accompanied by her daughters, visited Whitby for a summer holiday, staying at No. 1 Abbey Terrace, some of the rooms of which commanded a magnificent view of the sea.

Mr. Hudson, the railway king, was developing the West Cliff, and it was in one of the houses built by him that they stayed. It was during this visit that Mrs. Gaskell collected information which served as the basis of her story. It is most interesting to locate the places in her novels, for they have all an original somewhere, and not a few coincide with the places visited for rest or change.

It is a debatable question whether Mrs. Gaskell—having read of the terrible press-gang days at Whitby, which resulted in the riot of 1793—went there with the intention of verifying the facts and locating the events, or whether, having gone there for a holiday, she heard of the press-gang riots, and then gathered

her materials and planned her story of *Sylvia's Lovers*. Many think the latter was the case, for she rarely visited a locality without gaining some knowledge which she was able to utilise in her literary work.

Concerning *Sylvia's Lovers*, Mrs. Gaskell admitted that it was the one with which she had taken the greatest pains, having, contrary to her practice, re-written part of it. It is the only one of her novels which has a dedication. On the front page are the words :

" This book is dedicated to my dear husband, by her who best knows his value," and there is also a quotation from Tennyson :

> " Oh ! for thy voice to soothe and bless !
> What hope of answer, or redress ?
> Behind the veil ! Behind the veil ! "

Why this story rather than any other should be dedicated is not plain, for Mr. Gaskell shared all his wife's triumphs and trials as an author. She remarked concerning the novel, " It is the saddest story I have ever written." Like *Ruth* and *Mary Barton*, it is a story with a sob in it.

The tale deals with the misfortunes of a family living in a little farm on the outskirts of the town of Whitby in the days of 1793, though Mrs. Gaskell gives 1796 as the date. It was the time of the riot between the sailors and the Government officials—the Impress Service.

Like Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, the story opens with a minute description of the place in which the action takes place—Monkshaven—which is now easily recognised as Whitby. The period is the time of the press-gang days, during the reign of George III, when men from the Navy were scarce, and were forced into the service of their country by methods which would not be tolerated to-day.

The heroine is Sylvia Robson, the only daughter of a small farmer, who distinguished himself by encouraging the sailors to resist the press-gang. A riot ensued, and the farmer was arrested, tried, and hanged at York in 1793.

Sylvia has two lovers—one, her cousin, the patient, faithful Philip Hepburn, the draper's assistant at a shop in the market place ; the other, Charley Kinraid, the specksioneer on a whaling vessel, a brave, *debonnair* sailor, who wins Sylvia's heart by his manly conduct during the attack by the press-gang on the crew of his ship. He gets wounded, but although weak and ill, attends the funeral of the sailor who had lost his life in the press-gang fight. Sylvia sees him and falls in love with the hero. He leaves Whitby as the betrothed of the farmer's pretty daughter, and is afterwards taken captive by the press-gang. Sylvia mourns him as dead. Philip Hepburn knows he is alive, but keeps the knowledge from Sylvia, and, finally, wins his captivating cousin for his wife ; but his peace of mind is disturbed by his concealment of the truth. Afterwards Kinraid returns to find Philip the husband of his betrothed, and Sylvia vows with an oath never to forgive her husband. Philip, miserable and dejected, leaves his wife and little daughter and enlists as a soldier under the name of Harry Freeman. During the war in the East, he saves the life of Kinraid at the risk of his own, and returns to Monkshaven. There he lives as a poor, broken-down soldier, saves his child's life from drowning, and Sylvia finds her long-lost husband, a wreck of his former self. There is a reconciliation. Philip dies in the cottage on the quay, " within sound of the waves lapping on the shore," blessing his wife and asking for forgiveness for his one great sin of omission.

" ' My wife ! Sylvia ! Once more forgive me all.'

" 'Oh, wicked me! forgive me—me—Philip!' she answers. Then he spoke and said:

" 'Lord forgive us our trespasses,

" 'As we forgive each other.' "

He dies, and Sylvia also, shortly afterwards. Hester Rose erects an almshouse to his memory. Well might Mrs. Gaskell say "it was the saddest story she had ever written."

Since her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, published in 1857, she had only written *My Lady Ludlow* and a few short stories, one of which, *A Manchester Marriage*, was very similar in plot to *Sylvia's Lovers*, though on a smaller scale. The story is more like that of *Enoch Arden*, but it is well to remember that *A Manchester Marriage* and *Sylvia's Lovers* were both published some time before Tennyson's pathetic poem, so that if there is any question of plagiarising on account of the resemblance of the plots, Mrs. Gaskell can claim to have been first in the field. Moreover, it is said that Tennyson acknowledged that he got his first idea of *Enoch Arden* from *Sylvia's Lovers*.

Some of Mrs. Gaskell's admirers place this historical novel amongst her best work, and she herself stated that she had made most careful research in order that the story should be as accurate as possible. She consulted Dr. Young's *History of Whitby* to verify the accounts of the press-gang riots, and searched the British Museum for authentic information. She even succeeded in obtaining from the Admiralty, official documents relating to the impressment system, and a letter from Lieutenant Atkinson, the head of the Impress Service at Whitby, giving his version of the riots, and his complaint that the local magistrates rendered him very little assistance. Reading between the lines, it is easy to see that this method of obtaining recruits for the Royal Navy was not very popular even

among the upper classes. The mutiny of the fleet at the Nore in 1797, which startled England, and which was a great national crisis, could not be a matter of surprise to the thoughtful people who were acquainted with the treatment meted out to impressed sailors by the naval authorities.

Mrs. Gaskell also consulted one of the oldest Whitby residents, Mr. George Corney, whose name is perpetuated in the story. Mr. Corney not only lent Mrs. Gaskell a copy of Young's *History of Whitby*—a somewhat rare book—but was able to supply details concerning the riots of 1793. One of his granddaughters possesses an autograph copy of the first edition of *Sylvia's Lovers*, sent to Mr. Corney by Mrs. Gaskell, acknowledging "much valuable assistance given during the writing of this book." Among her other researches, the novelist ransacked records of trials at York, and succeeded in obtaining a copy of the trial of William Atkinson (Daniel Robson of the story), Hannah Hobson, and John Harrison, who were charged with being active in the attack on the Whitby rendezvous, the headquarters of the Government officials for supplying war vessels with recruits. Lastly, Mrs. Gaskell also corresponded with General Thompson, Member of Parliament for Hull, where there had been press-gang riots as at Whitby.

The novelist took great pains in planning her stories. Once having arranged her plot, she rarely departed from it. In *Sylvia's Lovers*, however, she admitted having re-written the return of Kinraid. Indeed, she took more pains with this novel than any other. Possibly this novel and the *Life of Charlotte Brontë* are the only books which she wrote that were not based on her own personal experiences.

Fifty years ago, Whitby was just becoming known beyond its own borders. Before the railway opened,

it was almost isolated from the rest of the busy world except by sea. The natives were quite content with their own affairs and indifferent to anything outside their immediate neighbourhood. It was this isolation which had so much to do in fostering the defiant and independent spirit which still clings to many of the Yorkshire villages. Commenting on this, Mrs. Gaskell writes :

" A Yorkshireman once said to me : ' My country folk are all alike. Their first thought is how to resist. Why ! I myself, if I hear a man say it is a fine day, catch myself trying to find out that it is no such thing. It is so in thought ; it is so in word ; it is so in deed.' "

Writing of the town before the introduction of railways, a local historian says :

" The old town, though regarded with much admiration by the neighbouring villages, and very progressive to the extent of its possibilities, was really only ' the petty metropolis ' of a primitive community ; shut in by the sea on one side and by the wild moorlands on the other, satisfied with its own local importance, and caring little for anything beyond its own affairs."

The sea and seafaring folk always had a peculiar attraction for Mrs. Gaskell, which she was wont to explain by saying : " The blood of the Vikings still lingers in my veins." Amongst her father's family papers, Mrs. Gaskell's maiden name was spelt Stevensen, which she had always believed to betray its Scandinavian origin. Her father's native town, Berwick-on-Tweed, was not very far away from this North Yorkshire fisher-town, and there are many Danish-Norwegian names of places and people along this coast.

The coast north of Whitby was very familiar to

Mrs. Gaskell thirty years before she visited this old-fashioned fishing town, when she lived for two years in Newcastle, a town which had a seafaring relationship with Whitby. The Newcastle collier boats knew well this somewhat treacherous bit of coast as they passed on their way to and from the south. Before the railway came to Whitby, a sea journey *viâ* Newcastle was the recognised way for travellers proceeding to London. This is shown in Philip Hepburn's journey to London, when he made his way northwards to Hartlepool, whence he could easily proceed either by land or sea to Newcastle, from which smacks were constantly sailing to London. Daniel Robson remarks on hearing the news:

"'Well, life's soon o'er; else when I were a young fellow, folks made their wills afore goin' to Lunnon,'" referring to a common custom in the eighteenth century for Whitby travellers to make their will before setting out for a long journey either by land or sea. The danger by land from robbers and highwaymen in those days was as much to be dreaded as the "perils on the sea."

Sailors and naval officers always interested Mrs. Gaskell, for she came of a seafaring family. Her paternal grandfather was a sea captain in the Royal Navy, and two of her uncles, as well as her only brother, were naval officers.

During her girlhood she may often have heard thrilling stories of the sea from her father's relatives, as well as from her only brother, the young lieutenant, who, during his furlough, visited her at Knutsford, causing no small commotion amongst the genteel "Amazons" in gossipy Cranford. How his loss at sea impressed itself on her memory is shown by the many references in her stories to sailors who were apparently lost at sea; but happily it suited her purpose to let

them return to their friends again, as did Charley Kinraid, though, unfortunately, John Stevenson, the young lieutenant, never returned. The seafaring characters in her stories are generally well drawn. Will Wilson in *Mary Barton* and Captain James in *My Lady Ludlow* may be taken as illustrations.

This old fishing port of Whitby was the very place to inspire Mrs. Gaskell to write a novel, especially as her publishers and "her bugbear, the public," were longing for another long story from her pen. She accurately describes Whitby, with its red-tiled roofs and houses grouped picturesquely around the mouth of the river Esk, which forms the setting around her story :

"The next turn of the road showed them the red peaked roofs of the closely-packed houses lying almost directly below the hill on which they were. The full autumn sun brought out the ruddy colour of the tiled gables, and deepened the shadows in the narrow streets. The narrow harbour at the mouth of the river was crowded with small vessels of all descriptions, making an intricate forest of masts. Beyond lay the sea, like a flat pavement of sapphire, scarcely a ripple varying its sunny surface, that stretched out leagues away till it blended with the softened azure of the sky. On this blue, trackless water floated scores of white-sailed fishing boats, apparently motionless, unless you measured their progress by some landmark ; but, still, and silent, and distant as they seemed, the consciousness that there were men on board, each going forth into the great deep, added unspeakably to the interest felt in watching them."

The Lord of the Manor of Whitby was a member of the Cholmondeley family, and was related to the great Cheshire family of that name. In addition, many of the old customs of Whitby were very similar to those

of Knutsford. This was especially the case with christenings, funerals, fair-days, and market-days. The town crier is still in request, prefacing his announcements by " Oyez ! oyez ! oyez ! " and finishing with " God Save the King, Amen ! " Mrs. Gaskell would have no difficulty in understanding many of the strange customs of those simple fisher-folk.

It is quite possible that Crabbe prepared the way for the novelist's tale of the press-gang days, for it is well known that from her early days she had been an admirer of his simple, homely poems. It will be remembered that in a letter to Mrs. Howitt she states that in her first literary venture, *Sketches of the Poor*, in which she collaborated with her husband, she tried to write " rather in the manner of Crabbe." Mrs. Gaskell not only tried to imitate Crabbe in her writings, but, like him, she had a leaning to a belief in the help given in dreams, and always had a light at hand by her bedside, in order to write down her thoughts on waking. In the *Life of Crabbe*, by his son, we read : " George Crabbe used to have a light and writing materials placed by his bedside every night when staying with Sir Walter Scott. Lady Scott told him she wondered the day was not enough for authorship. ' Dear lady,' he replied, ' I should have lost many a good bit had I not set down at once things that occurred to me in my dreams.' " Mrs. Gaskell treasured her dreams and her early morning thoughts, which came to her when she was not quite awake to the outside world, and these were of value to her in her stories.

Canon Ainger, who was a great admirer of Mrs. Gaskell's novels, especially of *Sylvia's Lovers*, says, in his *Life of Crabbe :* " What made Crabbe a new force in English poetry was, that in his verse ' pity ' appears after a long oblivion, as the true antidote to sentimentalism." It is this word " pity " that is the

keynote of many of Mrs. Gaskell's stories, and it was Crabbe's pity for the poor which attracted Mrs. Gaskell to his writings. Ian MacLaren's motto was said to be : " Be pitiful, for everyone is fighting a hard battle." Mrs. Gaskell may be said to have been moved by the same spirit. She wrote in *Mary Barton :* " ' Now, to my thinking, them that is strong in any of God's gifts is meant to help the weak.' " Possibly Crabbe first directed her attention to the evils and awful sufferings caused by the impressment system, for, in 1819, he published *Tales of the Hall*, which included a story of a young girl's sufferings caused by the press-gang system on the Norfolk coast. The short description of Ruth in Crabbe's story fits Sylvia perfectly. Ruth, says the poet,

> " Was tall and fair, and comely to behold,
> Gentle and simple, in her native place.
> Not one compared with her in form or face ;
> She was not merry, but she gave our hearth
> A cheerful spirit that was more than mirth."

Having read Crabbe's poem, Mrs. Gaskell would be prepared to weave a story in prose when she heard of the riot in 1793, which resulted in a Whitby resident —William Atkinson—being hanged at York for encouraging the sailors to resist the press-gang. Whitby, as an important port, had a Government press-gang rendezvous, or " randyvowse," as the natives termed it, in Haggersgate, and suffered much when the whalers came home, for the French had set Europe " on fire." England was raging with anti-French excitement, which was fanned by the Crown and its ministers. " We had our ships, but where were our men ? "

The Admiralty had a ready remedy. They issued " press-warrants," and the tales of hardship seem almost incredible :

"The men thus pressed were taken from the near grasp of parent or wives, and were often deprived of the hard earnings of years, which remained in the hands of the masters of the merchant-man in which they had served, subject to all the chances of honesty or dishonesty, life or death. Now, all this tyranny (for I can use no other word) is marvellous to us; we cannot imagine how it is that a nation submitted to it for so long, even under any warlike enthusiasm, any panic of invasion, any amount of loyal subservience to the governing powers. When we read of the military being called in to assist the civil power in backing up the press-gang, of parties of soldiers patrolling the streets, and sentries with screwed bayonets placed at every door while the press-gang entered and searched each hole and corner of the dwelling; when we hear of churches being surrounded during divine service by troops, while the press-gang stood ready at the door to seize men as they came out from attending public worship, and take these instances as merely types of what was constantly going on in different forms, we do not wonder at Lord Mayors, and other civic authorities in large towns, complaining that a stop was put to business by the danger which the tradesmen and their servants incurred in leaving their houses and going into the streets, infested by press-gangs."

Some thoughts were entertained of bringing William Atkinson to Whitby for execution to make the example more striking. The present writer was told by an old lady who lived in the house in which Mrs. Gaskell stayed when collecting information for her story, that her grandmother was living in one of the "yards" off Church Street when the press-gang riot occurred, and she joined the crowd and heard old Atkinson (Robson) say the very words which Mrs. Gaskell gives in her story:

" 'If a' was as young as onest a' was, a'd have t' randy-vowse down and mak' a bonfire on it. We'd ring t' fire-bell then t' some purpose.' "

Mrs. Gaskell gives a graphic picture of the fire at the rendezvous. The reference to the fire-bell being rung to some purpose relates to the false fire alarm which was rung by the press-gang officials, in order to get the men into the streets, with the object of capturing the best specimens for the Navy :

" One night—it was on a Saturday, February 23rd, when there was a bitter black frost, with a north-east wind sweeping through the streets, and men and women were close shut in their houses—all were startled in their household content and warmth by the sound of the fire-bell busily swinging, and pealing out for help. The fire-bell was kept in the market-house where High Street and Bridge Street met ; every one knew what it meant. Some dwelling, or maybe a boiling-house, was on fire, and neighbourly assistance was summoned with all speed, in a town where no water was laid on, nor fire-engines kept in readiness. Men snatched up their hats, and rushed out, wives following, some with the readiest wraps they could lay hands on, with which to clothe the over-hasty husbands, others from that mixture of dread and curiosity which draws people to the scene of any disaster. Those of the market people who were making the best of their way homewards, having waited in the town till the early darkness concealed their path, turned back at the sound of the ever-clanging fire-bell, ringing out faster and faster as if the danger became every instant more pressing.

" As men ran against or alongside of each other, their breathless question was ever, ' Where is it ? ' and no one could tell ; so they pressed onwards into the market-place, sure of obtaining the information

desired there, where the fire-bell kept calling out with its furious metal tongue.

"The dull oil lamps in the adjoining streets only made darkness visible in the thronged market-place, where the buzz of many men's unanswered questions was rising louder and louder. A strange feeling of dread crept over those nearest to the closed market-house. Above them in the air the bell was still clanging; but before them was a door fast shut and locked; no one to speak and tell them why they were summoned—where they ought to be. They were at the heart of the mystery, and it was a silent blank! Their unformed dread took shape at the cry from the outside of the crowd, from where men were still coming down the eastern side of Bridge Street. 'The gang! the gang!' shrieked out some one. 'The gang are upon us! Help! help!' Then the fire-bell had been a decoy; a sort of seething the kid in its mother's milk, leading men into a snare through their kindliest feelings. Some dull sense of this added to utter dismay, and made them struggle and strain to get to all the outlets save that in which a fight was now going on; the swish of heavy whips, the thud of bludgeons, the groans, the growls of wounded or infuriated men, coming with terrible distinctness through the darkness to the quickened ear of fear."

Mrs. Gaskell calls Whitby "Monkshaven" in her story, a name which accords with the place better than its real name, which is supposed to mean White Town. When the cluster of old thatched white cottages on the straggling East Cliff was seen in the distance, it presented a picture of a small town, white in appearance, round the mouth of the Esk. To-day the owners of these old houses have replaced the thatched roofs with bright red-fluted tiles, formerly made in Whitby, and, as seen from the West Cliff, the buildings

look more like red than white cottages. There is a joke current in the port, that Whitby is like the Yarmouth bloater : it has changed its coat from white to red, the white bloater having become a red herring. In Church Street (called in *Sylvia's Lovers* High Street, which really was the correct name two hundred years before the story opens) stands an old inn, which has for its sign The Monkshaven Hotel, being evidently named after Mrs. Gaskell's story, as its license was only granted about twenty-five years ago.

Mrs. Gaskell's description of this old fisher-town is so true to life, that Du Maurier illustrated the story from actual paintings without being aware of it. When reading *Sylvia's Lovers* with a view to illustrating it, he talked the matter over with the brother of his old colleague on the staff of *Punch,* Charles Keene, and he, having made some sketches of Whitby the year before, offered to lend them to Du Maurier because they seemed to resemble the place described by Mrs. Gaskell. As neither Du Maurier nor Keene knew that Monkshaven and Whitby were one and the same place, the paintings were merely used as illustrations rather than actual pictures of the places described in the novel. Afterwards, both were surprised to find that Monkshaven and Whitby were synonymous, and it is certainly a great tribute to Mrs. Gaskell's descriptive powers that the story should have been illustrated by actual sketches of the picturesque seaport which it describes, though the artist was not aware of the fact.

In after years, " Whitby was the place we all like best in the world," wrote Du Maurier, and for years he visited the old fisher-town with his family, staying at the first house in St. Hilda's Terrace, at the top of the steep street leading into the old town. A hundred years before, in this same house, lived Dr. Young, the local Presbyterian minister, who wrote an admirable

history of Whitby, in two volumes, which were published in 1817.

The ways and doings of this picturesque fishing town appeared in *Punch* after Du Maurier became acquainted with it so intimately. It was whilst staying at Whitby that he met James Russell Lowell, who spent no fewer than nine successive holidays here. At a modest house near the cliff, Lowell used to receive Du Maurier, Henry Smalley, John Leech, and Henry James at his little dinner parties. Canon Ainger was also enamoured of Whitby, and on the advice of Du Maurier he took his family there, and made expeditions to Sylvia's cottage—the Haytersbank Farm—so graphically described by Mrs. Gaskell.

Du Maurier, writing to Canon Ainger in 1896, says :

" It is delightful to get a letter from you at Whitby —the place we all like the best in the world. . . . It's all right when you know it, but you've got to know it fust." Then follows advice as to places worth seeing. Staithes is specially referred to, and Canon Ainger's friends are advised to go there at four, five, or six o'clock p.m., " a little before high tide to see some forty or fifty cobbles disembark to herring-fish, with all the town, women and children, pushing the boats off," which he declares to be the loveliest sight he ever saw. Du Maurier named one of his daughters Sylvia, after the heroine, and at the old Haytersbank Farm and also at Molly Corney's old home there is a Sylvia in remembrance of Mrs. Gaskell's story.

Having fixed the date of the story as 1796 to 1799, Mrs. Gaskell gathered together her materials, studying the history of Whitby for that period. The whale fishery, shipbuilding, sail-cloth-making, rope-twisting, and, in the outlying districts, farming were the principal occupations, whilst in the cottages spinning and

weaving engaged the attention of many of the women folk. There were also the alum mines, which were said to rival those of Italy, and which yielded much wealth to the place. These were prosperous days for the old port. There was no need in those days to build lodging and boarding-houses for visitors. Whitby had enough and to spare for its population. Besides coal and spirits, there were few imports. The fisher-folk were independent of outside supplies.

Mrs. Gaskell uses her artistic talent to the full when describing the homecoming of the whaling boats. It is a vivid account of actual life in those adventurous days at Whitby, when many of the brave sons of the port went out to Greenland seas to hunt the whale. The first part of the road which Sylvia and Molly actually trod on their way to market cannot be followed on account of a landslip, a new road taking the place of the old coast road. Mrs. Gaskell gives a pleasing picture of the two girls walking barefooted and then washing their feet in the stream, afterwards putting on their smart shoes fastened with steel clasps, similar to the clogs worn in Lancashire. They would need to be strong rather than ornamental, for it was not until 1831 that flag-stones were substituted for the toe-torturing pebbles which formed the hard, uneven footpaths in the narrow and steep streets of Whitby.

The most successful whaling-boat was the *Resolution*. It is recorded that on one occasion she brought home the produce of twenty-eight whales, which yielded 230 tons of oil, and sold for £9,000. Mrs. Gaskell uses the name *Resolution* for the whaler which Sylvia and Molly saw entering the harbour on their way to market to sell their eggs. She shows her intuition by the way in which she enters into the feelings of those wives, daughters, sweethearts, and

friends, as they stand on the old pier and crowd the staithes, anxious to know if their loved ones are safe after their six months' absence in the dreary Arctic seas. At the same time, she shares the happiness of the five or six girls swaying and singing :

> " Weel may the keel row, the keel row, the keel row,
> Weel may the keel row that my laddie's in."

At the present time, the fishing-boats only go out to the herring-fishery round the coast. The whaling boats belong to the past. In a field near Whitby may be seen an archway formed by a couple of gigantic whale jaws, " through which a carriage and pair could easily be driven." They tell of the time when the whale industry was a source of much revenue to the old seaport. Mrs. Gaskell mentions " these ghastly whale jaws, which formed the arches over the gate-posts to many a field or moorland sketch."

So well does Mrs. Gaskell introduce Sylvia and Molly to us, that we grasp their characters at once—the saucy, independent Sylvia, the only child from the farm at Haytersbank, whom all the men fall in love with, and the brusque, plain-spoken Molly, one of a large family, from Moss Brow Farm, only a short distance away, who has to rely on other qualities than good looks in getting a husband.

The old farms are still there, and it is possible to walk along part of the road, over which these light-hearted farmers' daughters tripped with their baskets to the old market-place in Church Street. The corner shop where they left their baskets while they ran along the staithes can be localised, and Foster's old shop, where Sylvia chose the duffle for her scarlet cloak, still exists, though now divided into two distinct shops, instead of the grocery and drapery departments as described by Mrs. Gaskell.

JONATHAN SANDERS

(the original of Jeremiah Foster)

From a silhouette in his great-grand-daughter's possession

These well-built premises formed originally a grocer's and sail-cloth maker's business house. There is no record of the building having at any time been used for drapery. The best draper's shop was further up the narrow street, but Philip Hepburn could not have seen Sylvia trimming her hat in the market place from this draper's shop. Mrs. Gaskell, therefore, altered the facts a little to suit her purpose. The Quaker brothers, Jonathan and George Sanders, owned this prosperous business facing the old market-hall, and they were the originals of Foster Brothers. They started a primitive sort of bank in connection with the shop in the year 1779, and their sons put this part of the business on a better footing in 1811. There are several old people in Whitby who still possess some of Sanders' bank notes, and a great-grand-daughter of Quaker Sanders preserves his silhouette portrait, which holds the place of honour on her mantel-piece.

Over the glass fanlight of the old shop may still be seen J. Sanders, engraved on the glass; and Dr. Young, in his *History of Whitby*, mentions that Sanders' shop was in Church Street, so that there is no doubt that this was the home of Philip and Sylvia after their marriage. These Quaker brothers were related to the Sanders family at Newcastle, and in that way Mrs. Gaskell may have heard something of them when she lived with the Rev. William Turner in 1829. They were evidently a literary family, for, when Dr. Young published his *History of Whitby* in two volumes in 1817, the Sanders of Newcastle are mentioned as subscribers, having taken two copies on drawing-paper and one of the ordinary copies. The Quaker Sanders of Whitby each subscribed for a copy. Joseph and George Sanders also added their names to the list of subscribers.

This is the only case of seven orders consisting of fourteen volumes going to one family, and helps to prove what Mrs. Gaskell says that John and Jeremiah Foster were so rich that they could buy up all the new town across the bridge. In addition to the grocery and banking business, they derived a great part of their income from the manufacture of sail-cloth. In this old business house are the secret cupboards in the walls, which were formerly used for smuggled goods.

Though scrupulous in most things, it did not go against the conscience of these two good brothers to purchase goods which had not paid duty. The windows of the shop have been fitted with larger panes of glass, but the original shutters are there and the heavy iron cross-bars which were necessary for a banker's house. There is also the quaint, broad, iron knocker on the door in the covered passage which led to the Fosters' yard. This is probably the knocker which the smugglers used to attract the attention of John or Jeremiah Foster. A heavy trap-door in the yard leads by underground passages to the river side, and no doubt this was one means by which smuggled goods were conveyed to the Quakers' shop.

Haytersbank Farm, the home of the farmer, Robson, and Moss Brow, where Molly Corney's mother, who came from "Newcassel way," muddled along with her large family, are still to be seen near Sandsend. To reach Haytersbank Farm, the visitor can take what was formerly an open road on the West Cliff. Part has been swept away by a landslip, and with it went the old Mulgrave Inn, where Sylvia's father was wont to break his journey. It had stood for over a century as a good resting place for man and beast. Although the old inn was not actually swept away, it was found to be unsafe, and it was feared

that another storm on the coast would demolish it. In the eighteenth century this old hostelry was a noted smugglers' resort, and not far from it is a cave, once used by lawless adventurers as a retreat and a place for secreting contraband goods.

When Prince Duleep Singh rented Mulgrave Hall from the Rev. the Marquis of Normanby, he constructed a new road along the cliff. Visitors to Haytersbank may use this road, and, turning to the left, pass under the railway bridge. This carriage-way brings them to the farm, which is approached through a gate on the left. A much pleasanter way is to pass *over* the railway bridge by the White House Hotel. Then proceed through the stile on the right and along a couple of fields parallel with the golf links. The dell is crossed by a foot bridge, whence the path leads straight to Haytersbank Farm, a hundred yards away. Du Maurier, writing to Canon Ainger, who with his daughters was staying at Whitby, says :

" Tell them to walk along the cliffs westward from the Spa through fields and over stiles till they reach Sylvia Robson's Cottage (of course, they know their *Sylvia's Lovers* by heart), and tell them, oh ! tell them to stand on the bridge at sundown and see the shops lighting up along the staithes and the fisher boats (if the tide suits) go sailing out into the west." [1]

When the Mulgrave Inn was demolished, some of the stones were used to repair Sylvia's cottage, as the Haytersbank Farm has come to be called.

The many readers who have enjoyed *Sylvia's Lovers* have reason to be grateful to the owner of this building for keeping it in such a good state of preservation. The doorway has been altered, and the way from the kitchen has been blocked up ; but the fabric of the building is there, just as it was when Philip went to give Sylvia her lessons. There is a very old window

[1] *Life of Canon Ainger*, by Edith Sichel.

at the gable end of Haytersbank, which the owners call Sylvia's window, because it was probably from here that she called " good-bye " to poor Philip before he started on his first journey to London. There is also a wooden ladder placed where the old staircase formerly stood, up which Philip followed his sorely offended Sylvia, who was angry because he had spoken ill of Kinraid, and had warned her that he had been faithless to other girls. Near to Haytersbank Farm is an old stone horse-mount, which would remind Mrs. Gaskell of the one at Sandlebridge, from which she had often mounted her uncle's pony. There are several horse-mounts in Whitby : one by the parish church, another in the main street, and still another near the stile which Sylvia had to pass to and from her home. The reader cannot help sympathising with Philip Hepburn in his patient wooing of this sarcastic and indifferent cousin of his, who from the first despised him.

" ' Sylvia ! I'm going away ; say good-by.' No answer. Not a sound heard. ' Sylvia ! ' (a little louder, and less hoarsely spoken) ; there was no reply. ' Sylvia ! I shall be a long time away ; perhaps I may niver come back at all ' ; here he bitterly thought of an unregarded death. ' Say good-by.' No answer. He waited patiently. Can she be wearied out, and gone to sleep, he wondered. Yet once again—' Good-by, Sylvia, and God bless yo' ! I'm sorry I vexed yo'.' "

" No reply.

" With a heavy, heavy heart he creaked down the stairs, felt for his cap, and left the house.

" ' She's warned, any way,' thought he. Just at that moment the little casement window of Sylvia's room was opened, and she said—

" ' Good-by, Philip ! ' "

With regard to the names in *Sylvia's Lovers*, it is interesting to find from Dr. Young's history that there were twelve families of the name of Robson in Whitby in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. Corney is an old Whitby name, and as Fishburn was the name of the richest man in Whitby at the time of her story, the novelist uses his name in connection with actual facts. Simpson was a well-known Whitby name dating back from 1759. Atkinson was the real name of the Government official in charge of the rendezvous and also of the original of Daniel Robson. A descendant of Sir Hugh Cholmley, or Cholmondeley, was Lord of the Manor. Hepburn, Kinraid, Coulson, Rose, and Dobson were names given to those who were not natives of the old fisher-town, and Sanders was "from Newcassel way"; but Mrs. Gaskell changes it to Foster, probably because members of the family were still living at Whitby, and what she said of the religious Quaker brothers not being over-scrupulous about taking in smuggled goods at their private door up the covered entry was not quite what their descendants would wish proclaimed from the housetops, although she qualifies her remarks by saying later on: "Everybody in Monkshaven smuggled who could, and everyone wore smuggled goods who could."

Moreover, Mrs. Gaskell had suffered for her indiscretions with regard to aspersions cast on certain families in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and she had no wish to find herself in another "hornets' nest."

There are good jokes current in Whitby still about the great-grandmothers who went to market on their ponies with loose garments hanging on their shrunken forms, but returned so stout, that they could hardly keep their saddle, with their dresses padded with smuggled goods and their panniers filled with the

spoils of those who considered it no sin to cheat the Government.

"The clever way in which certain women managed to bring in prohibited goods; how in fact when a woman did give her mind to smuggling, she was more full of resources, and tricks, and impudence, and energy, than any man. There was no question of the morality of the affair; one of the greatest signs of the real progress we have made since those times seems to be that our daily concerns of buying and selling, eating and drinking, whatsoever we do, are more tested by the real practical standard of our religion than they were in the days of our grandfathers."

There is one other name in the book around which a gallant story centres. Mrs. Gaskell attaches it to Philip Hepburn after he leaves his wife and child and becomes a soldier, fighting in the Holy Land, where he bravely saves the life of his rival Kinraid; then, later on, after returning a poor wreck, loses his life in rescuing his little daughter from the sea just off the West Cliff. After Philip joins the Army, he is known as Stephen Freeman, and it is interesting to know that just about the time when Mrs. Gaskell was staying at Whitby, verifying the facts of her story, a fine, stalwart young fellow came from Bridlington to Whitby with a firm of builders who were erecting houses near to the one in which Mrs. Gaskell was staying. He was passionately fond of the sea, and had what the natives call "a sea brain." Shortly after he came to the town, he volunteered for the life-boat service, and very soon was made second cox-swain. Had he lived in the prosperous days of the whale fishery, he would probably have joined the whaling fleet off the coast of Greenland. This young fisherman's name was Henry Freeman, known to this day as the brave coxswain, Harry Freeman. He

QUAKER SANDERS' SHOP, MARKET PLACE, WHITBY

(See p. 376)

ANCIENT CROSS, ABBEY PLAIN, WHITBY

helped to save no fewer than 335 lives on this stormy coast. A new lifeboat was recently launched at Whitby, and at the ceremony the Rector repeated the story of the worst lifeboat disaster ever recorded round that coast, when Harry Freeman was the only one saved, and mentioned the monument to these brave lifeboat men, which is in the shape of a pagan temple, in the vestibule of the parish church at Whitby.

The old market-place in Whitby is still to be seen. It forms a small square, measuring thirty-five by eighteen yards, with a miniature town-hall supported on pillars. Underneath and around this building, women still sit selling their produce on Saturdays, which is the market-day, though butter and eggs are now sold mainly in the new covered market, which has been built at one corner of the Market Square. It is almost a jest to speak of this building as a Town Hall. The space occupied is only eleven yards by nine yards, yet Dr. Young describes it as " the elegant town-hall."

Mrs. Gaskell could not have accepted Dr. Young's account of the history of the different crosses, for he states that the old mutilated cross in the Abbey Plain was never used as a market-cross, but had always been known as a religious or burial-cross. There are other local historians who think that the Abbey Plain was formerly a part of the graveyard attached to the Abbey, and that the old cross was either a monument erected to the memory of some great person connected with the monastery, or that it was set up as a holy cross for pilgrims who came to worship. Mrs. Gaskell evidently followed Charlton, the first historian of Whitby, who wrote in 1799. He maintained that the Abbey Cross was formerly the Market Cross, but as the Market Hall was erected in 1640 by Sir Hugh Cholmley on the present site, it is evident that Sylvia

and Molly did not sit near the Abbey Cross to sell their butter and eggs. Why Mrs. Gaskell should fix the market-day as Wednesday is strange, as it appears from a charter granted by Henry VI in 1445, that the Abbot and Convent had been accustomed from time immemorial to hold a market at Whitby every Lord's Day throughout the year. King Charles confirmed this, but changed the day from Sunday to Saturday, and Saturday it still remains. The old custom of ringing the curfew-bell every evening at six o'clock is still kept up at Whitby.

Du Maurier, writing to Canon Ainger, who had some friends staying at Whitby in 1896, advises them not to forget that Saturday is market-day, and adds: "During August, numbers of artists may be seen painting the busy scene on Saturday mornings, greatly to the wonder and amusement of the vendors, as they see nothing picturesque about buying and selling. They are most concerned about the amount of money received."[1]

Molly Corney's farm, the other homestead connected with *Sylvia's Lovers*, is not far from Haytersbank Farm. Additions have been made to it, and the building has been slightly altered in appearance:

"Moss Brow, the Corneys' house, was but a disorderly, comfortless place. You had to cross a dirty farmyard, all puddles and dung-heaps, on stepping stones to get to the door of the house-place. That great room itself was sure to have clothes hanging to dry at the fire whatever day of the week it was; some one of the large, irregular family having had what is called in the district a 'dab-wash' of a few articles, forgotten on the regular day. And sometimes these articles lay in their dirty state in the untidy kitchen, out of which a room, half-parlour, half-bedroom, opened on one side, and a dairy, the only clean place

[1] *Life of Canon Ainger*, by Edith Sichel.

in the house, at the opposite. In face of you, as you entered the door, was the entrance to the working-kitchen, or scullery. Still, in spite of disorder like this, there was a well-to-do aspect about the place; the Corneys were rich in their way, in flocks and herds as well as in children; and to them neither dirt nor the perpetual bustle arising from ill-ordered work detracted from comfort. They were all of an easy, good-tempered nature; Mrs. Corney and her daughters gave every one a welcome at whatever time of the day they came, and would just as soon sit down for a gossip at ten o'clock in the morning, as at five in the evening, though at the former time the house-place was full of work of various kinds which ought to be got out of hand and done with; while the latter hour was towards the end of the day, when farmers' wives and daughters were usually—'cleaned' was the word then, 'dressed' is that in vogue now."

The orchard is still there with its old apple-trees, and Mrs. Gaskell's description well describes the old part as it is to-day. There is a little gate leading to the old orchard still, but the tenants of the farm do not appear to know that the place is described in *Sylvia's Lovers*, and few of the residents of Whitby are able to identify the places mentioned in the story:

"But Sylvia was half-way across the back-yard—worse, if possible than the front as to the condition in which it was kept—and had pass'd through the little gate into the orchard. It was full of old gnarled apple-trees, their trunks covered with gray lichen, in which the cunning chaffinch built her nest in spring-time. The cankered branches remained on the trees, and added to the knotted interweaving overhead, if they did not to the productiveness; the grass grew in long tufts, and was wet and tangled underfoot. There was a tolerable crop of rosy apples still hanging

on the gray old trees, and here and there they showed ruddy in the green bosses of untrimmed grass. Why the fruit was not gathered, as it was evidently ripe, would have puzzled any one not acquainted with the Corney family to say; but to them it was always a maxim in practice, if not in precept, 'Do nothing to-day that you can put off till to-morrow,' and accordingly the apples dropped from the trees at any little gust of wind, and lay rotting on the ground until the 'lads' wanted a supply of pies for supper."

Mary Linskill, the author of *Between the Heather and the North Sea*, *The Haven under the Hill*, and several other novels which tell of her native Whitby and its people, is the one writer whose name is familiar to the natives. Her name is held in remembrance by two monuments, and one of the public squares is named after her. She followed in Mrs. Gaskell's footsteps as a writer dealing with Whitby scenes and people. Beyond the name Monkshaven given to the inn in Church Street, there is no trace of Mrs. Gaskell's story having been publicly recognized in Whitby, except that Du Maurier wrote of Haytersbank Farm as Sylvia's Cottage, but the real name is Straggleton Farm, and Moss Brow is known as High Straggleton Farm.

Mrs. Gaskell's description of the sailor's funeral is very pathetic. Here Sylvia gets her heart's desire when she sees the hero of the whaling fleet, though the worldly-wise Molly Corney had asked Sylvia to attend the funeral, in order to find out "the latest fashions in cloaks by seeing whether the Misses Fishburn—who were sure to be at church—wore hoods or capes to their cloaks." The moving and touching scene of the sailor's funeral is skilfully portrayed. Every little detail is carefully worked in, even to the cackle of the geese on some farm on the moors as they were coming home to roost:

THE PARISH CHURCH, WHITBY

HAYTERSBANK FARM

(*The long low building*)

(see p. 177)

How weird the scene in the solemn stillness which surrounds the funeral party as it comes winding up the hundred and ninety-nine steps, " the bearers resting their heavy burden here and there, and standing in silent groups at each landing place ; now lost to sight, as a piece of broken, overhanging ground intervened, now emerging suddenly nearer, and overhead the great church bell, with its mediæval inscription, familiar to the Vicar if to no one else—

" ' I to the grave do summon all.' "

Mrs. Gaskell has not got the true facts with regard to the bells. Possibly she had heard that each of the four bells had an inscription, and she coined a motto to suit her purpose. The old churchyard, perched on the edge of the cliff, is an ideal spot for a sailor's funeral. The waves can be heard lashing the cliffs below, part of which have been washed away since Mrs. Gaskell visited Whitby. The same gravestones are there, but the corrosive action of the sea air has obliterated many names which told of those who had " perished in the Greenland sea," were " shipwrecked in the Baltic," or " drowned off the coast of Ireland." The most conspicuous monument now is the beautifully carved Cædmon Cross, erected by the people of Whitby by public subscription, at the suggestion of Canon Rawnsley, to testify to their appreciation of the father of English poetry, who lived in the old Abbey in Whitby more than thirteen hundred years ago.

Mrs. Gaskell gives the church the name of St. Nicholas, the sailors' patron saint, but it has long been known as St. Mary's, though the original church is said to have been dedicated to St. Peter. The present church was begun in Norman times. It is low and massive outside and quaint and ugly within. The numerous memorial tablets tell of the good deeds

of the departed, and the black boards containing the ten commandments, put up by order of Queen Elizabeth, are the only decorations on the walls. The church was stripped of its interior grandeur in the days when the monastery was destroyed. The walls now look bare and cold. There is a three-decker pulpit, with the parson's commodious pew at the foot, and here and there pews with their owner's name painted in white letters ; others with the name of outlying districts, certain " territorial " pews apparently being reserved for the people of neighbouring villages. The majority of these high, baize-lined, square pews were " for strangers," so that there is no need for visitors to ask for a seat.

The ancient church has been added to and altered many times since it was built. Much of the interior work has been done by ships' carpenters, who have put skylights right and left, just as was customary on board ship. The old, high windows have been lowered, but there is still something nautical about this church. Mrs. Gaskell's characteristic homily on the old parson in the latter part of the eighteenth century, gives her an opportunity of speaking her mind from a Dissenter's point of view. As a life-long Unitarian, she despised the comfortable, easily satisfied way of preaching common to some clergymen of that time.

" The vicar of Monkshaven was a kindly, peaceable old man, hating strife and troubled waters above everything. He was a vehement Tory in theory, as became his cloth in those days. He had two bug-bears to fear—the French and the Dissenters. It was difficult to say of which he had the worst opinion and the most intense dread. Perhaps he hated the Dissenters most because they came nearer in contact with him than the French ; besides, the French had

the excuse of being Papists, while the Dissenters might have belonged to the Church of England if they had not been utterly depraved. Yet in practice Dr. Wilson did not object to dine with Mr. Fishburn, who was a personal friend and follower of Wesley's; but then, as the doctor would say, 'Wesley was an Oxford man, and that makes him a gentleman; and he was an ordained minister of the Church of England, so that grace can never depart from him.' But I do not know what excuse he would have alleged for sending broth and vegetables to old Ralph Thompson, a rabid Independent, who had been given to abusing the church and the vicar, from a Dissenting pulpit, as long as ever he could mount the stairs. However, that inconsistency between Dr. Wilson's theories and practice was not generally known in Monkshaven, so we have nothing to do with it."

After the sailor's funeral, when Sylvia sees Kinraid, the hero of the hour, and straightway falls in love with him, Hepburn's troubles begin, and we follow him through his sad wooing of Sylvia—the pet of the home, and his "idol," as he confesses on his death-bed. Mrs. Gaskell gives us the different opinions current about this daughter, who always found favour in the eyes of men, though the women were not equally in sympathy with her:

"To be sure, it was only to her father and mother that she remained the same as she had been when an awkward lassie of thirteen. Out of the house there were the most contradictory opinions of her, especially if the voices of women were to be listened to. She was an 'ill-favoured, overgrown thing'; 'just as bonny as the first rose i' June, and as sweet i' her nature as t' honeysuckle a-climbing round it'; she was 'a vixen, with a tongue sharp enough to make yer very heart bleed'; she was 'just a bit o'

sunshine wherever she went' ; she was sulky, lively, witty, silent, affectionate, or cold-hearted, according to the person who spoke about her. In fact, her peculiarity seemed to be this—that every one who knew her talked about her either in praise or blame ; in church, or in market, she unconsciously attracted attention ; they could not forget her presence, as they could that of other girls perhaps more personally attractive."

Sylvia is not one of the best of Mrs. Gaskell's characters. The author does not quite succeed in showing us where the girl's worth lay, and near the end of the story, where Sylvia complains of Kinraid's marriage and compares Philip's constant love with Kinraid's, we see the fickleness of the heroine and deplore her shallow nature :

" 'Philip had a deal o' good in him. And I dunnot think as he would have gone and married another woman so soon, if he'd been i' Kinraid's place.'"

Philip, with all his constancy, reminds us of Molly Gibson, and when Mrs. Robson says : " 'Thou'st been a deal o' comfort to me, lad, a'most as one as if thou wast a child o' my own,'" we remember Roger Hamley's mother saying to Molly : " 'You're a real comfort to mothers.'"

Sylvia Robson and Cynthia Kirkpatrick have something in common, for both are unable to appreciate the steady, faithful, but undemonstrative lover. The latter part of the story is rather too full of wonderful coincidences. Philip receiving the coin from Kinraid at Portsmouth, and Sylvia's child giving the half-crown, are perhaps a little too far-fetched, and it is necessary to make a protest similar to Charlotte Brontë's with regard to Ruth : Why should Philip die ? But the last chapter is in Mrs. Gaskell's best style, and it is safe to affirm that she sat on the staith near widow

Robson's cottage whilst she wrote it, within sound of the " ceaseless waves lapping against the shelving shore." The novelist had evidently made herself quite familiar with the old customs of the natives, for the story of the half-crown which little Bella gave to the poor beggar—her unknown father—was probably suggested by what was known in Whitby as a " sacrament piece."

" ' He's a queer tyke, yet—he out's wi' a good half crown, all wrapped up i' paper, and he axes me to make a hole in it.' "

A " sacrament piece " was a half-crown given as a sacramental offering, and purchased by the person with thirty pence, begged of thirty poor widows. After having been carried nine times up and down the church aisle, a hole was drilled in the coin, and it was then tied on a ribbon and worn as a certain cure for epilepsy.

Hester Rose is a character kept in the background and drawn with great skill. Mrs. Gaskell understood those " who only stand and wait " and remain in the shade.

" Hester groaned in heart over the remembrance of Sylvia's words : ' I can niver forgive him the wrong he did to me ' that night when Hester had come and clung to her, making the sad, shameful confession of her unreturned love. . . ."

" Her own misery at this contemplation of the case was too great to bear, and she sought her usual refuge in the thought of some text, some promise of Scripture which should strengthen her faith.

" ' With God all things are possible.' . . . Yes ! but ofttimes He does His work with awful instruments. There is a peacemaker whose name is Death."

The conclusion of *Sylvia's Lovers* is very similar to the final chapter in *Ruth*, only that we are present at Philip's death and hear the sobs of poor Sylvia, ready

to atone when it is too late; but it is not Sylvia's voice that we hear, but that of the dying husband, Philip Hepburn:

"'I did thee a cruel wrong. I see it now, but I am a dying man. I think that God will forgive me. . . . .'

"He heard through the open window the waves lapping on the shelving shore, but there came no word from her—only the same, long, shivering, miserable sigh, broke from her lips at length.

"'Child,' said Philip, 'I ha' made thee my idol.'"

From the time of Philip's flight, the story seems to lose some of its interest until the last chapter is reached. It was this that led Canon Ainger to remark that "the first two volumes of *Sylvia's Lovers* were the best thing that Mrs. Gaskell had ever written." The omission of any reference to the third volume is significant. It would appear that the novelist had been compelled to make the story longer than she would otherwise have done. She also fails in her descriptions of scenes with which she could have had little acquaintance. Where she excels is in the pathos of the final scene where Sylvia and Philip are reunited. Mrs. Gaskell had once thought of giving the title of "Philip's Idol" to her story, and it would not have been inappropriate, though *Sylvia's Lovers* seems more attractive.

At the end of the story we get a kind of a post-script telling of Whitby seventy years later, when Mrs. Gaskell was finishing her story in 1862:

"Monkshaven is altered now into a rising bathing place. Yet, standing near the site of Widow Dobson's house, on a summer night, at the ebb of a spring tide, you may hear the waves . . . with the same ceaseless, ever-recurrent sound as that which Philip listened to, in the pauses between life and death.

And so it will be, until 'there shall be no more sea.'"

Having shown that there is actual fact for the story of the press-gang riots, Mrs. Gaskell supplies the foundation of the most tragic part of the story:

"But the memory of man fades away. A few old people can still tell you the tradition of the man who died in a cottage somewhere about this spot, died of starvation while his wife lived in hard-hearted plenty not two good stones' throws away. This is the form into which popular feeling, and ignorance of the real facts, have moulded the story. Not long since a lady went to the 'Public Baths,' a handsome stone building erected on the very site of Widow Dobson's cottage, and finding all the rooms engaged, she sat down and had some talk with the bathing woman; and, as it chanced, the conversation fell on Philip Hepburn and the legend of his fate.

"'I knew an old man when I was a girl,' said the bathing woman, 'as could niver abide to hear t' wife blamed. He would say nothing again' th' husband; he used to say as it were not fit for men to be judging; that she had had her sore trial, as well as Hepburn hisself.'

"The lady asked, 'What became of the wife?'

"'She was a pale, sad woman, allays dressed in black. I can just remember her when I was a little child, but she died before her daughter was well grown up; and Miss Rose took th' lassie, as had always been like her own.'

"'Miss Rose?'

"'Hester Rose! have yo' niver heard of Hester Rose, she as founded t' alms-houses for poor disabled sailors and soldiers on t' Horncastle road? There's a piece o' stone in front to say that "This building is erected in memory of P. H."—and some folk will

have it P. H. stands for t' name o' th' man as was starved to death.' "

The almshouses were erected, according to the memorial stone, in 1673, for sailors' widows and old sailors and their wives. Some of these old houses were pulled down and rebuilt in 1909. At present, there is no sign of the initials P. H. There are certain " free houses " in Whitby which have been left by different ladies for the poor of Whitby. One was " willed " by an old Whitby lady about the time that Mrs. Gaskell wrote her story. The once prosperous Fosters left Whitby, one member going out to Australia, though Mrs. Gaskell gives America as his destination. All this goes to prove that *Sylvia's Lovers* is a faithful story of Whitby in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and it is evident that Mrs. Gaskell's talent for story-telling was such that, given these facts, she wove a story which contains historical as well as literary truth.

In some cases, the Yorkshire dialect is at fault. Lancashire and Yorkshire, although next-door neighbours, speak a different language, and occasionally Mrs. Gaskell mixes Lancashire with Yorkshire. The story shows greater talent than genius. Among those who have praised *Sylvia's Lovers* are Du Maurier, who illustrated the story ; Canon Ainger, who described it as the best of Mrs. Gaskell's novels ; and Canon Liddon. Prof. Ward, in his introduction to *Sylvia's Lovers*, says :

" How and in what happy hour this inspiration, to which she owed the conception of her story and, above all, the conception of its heroine—a lovely creation before which all criticism melts away into pure delight—came to the authoress, who shall say ? It would be almost equally interesting to know how she proceeded to shape these first ideas and to mould

them into the form which they took in her story. For in this story, which is one of the life of sailors, shopkeepers and peasants, not a page, and hardly so much as a turn of phrase is to be found which does not seem perfectly true to life."

This seems very high praise, and some may think it too high ; but it is, at any rate, the opinion of one whose judgment merits our earnest consideration. In contrast with this, when the book first appeared, Sylvia was described by an American critic as the worst specimen of womanhood he had ever been asked to study, and most unreal besides. The conduct of wife and husband (continued the same detractor) equally violated probability. The passion and its effects were alike unrestrained, and when the husband, driven from the home by his wife's termagant insult after years of suffering, came home a wounded pauper to crave her forgiveness, the exaggeration rose to the point of absurdity. The whole tale was described as the most painful and unsatisfactory of recent novels. This agrees with the opinion expressed by one of our most able reviewers.

The descriptive parts are drawn with a master-hand, which few novelists of Mrs. Gaskell's day could equal. They are both true to nature and to fact, but the principal characters do not convince one as being true to life. Sylvia and Philip are both weak when they are expected to be strong ; witness the selfishness of the one and the self-imposed penance of the other. Mrs. Gaskell's genius lay in writing from experience of what she really knew and understood, rather than in collecting facts of a previous century and planning a story to fit them. This accounts for the fact that *Sylvia's Lovers* did not add greatly to the author's reputation, and this she herself felt ; but in her succeeding stories, *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and*

Daughters, she came back to her own, as a writer who wrote of real people whom she understood, and whose memories lived in a world where the best side of their nature gained in strength as they grew older, their lives serving to illustrate some underlying principle which gives the readers the purpose of the story.

CHAPTER XIX

MANCHESTER

(1860–1865)

THE *Cornhill Magazine*—Mrs. Gaskell's contribution to the First Volume—*Curious, if True*—*The Grey Woman*—Papers on French Life contributed to *Fraser's Magazine*—Mrs. Gaskell Visits Thackeray—The Cotton Panic—Visit to Eastbourne—*A Dark Night's Work*—*Six Weeks at Heppenheim*—Preface to Translation of *Garibaldi at Caprera*—*Sylvia's Lovers* Published—Visit to France—Madame Récamier—Mrs. Gaskell's Diary—Death of Thackeray—Visit to Brighton—*Crowley Castle*—*An Italian Institution*—Dr. Furnivall and Mr. George Smith—Suggestion that Mrs. Gaskell should write a Serial for the *Cornhill Magazine*—*Cousin Phillis*—*Wives and Daughters*—Mr. Frederick Greenwood adds the Last Chapter after Mrs. Gaskell's Death.

THE *Cornhill Magazine* commenced its career in January, 1860, with Thackeray as editor. Mrs. Gaskell's name appears in the list of those who were asked to become contributors. Possibly her first contribution was crowded out of the January number, but in February there appeared an unsigned story said to be "An Extract from a letter from Richard Whittingham, Esq.," to which the late Mr. George Smith gave the title, *Curious, if True*. This had been suggested to him by a letter from the novelist, in which she had inferred that the readers would possibly think it *might* be true. Richard Whittingham, an English traveller in France, loses his way, and finds shelter in a French house, where he has a strange experience.

The story is a kind of fairy tale, founded on the old

well-known English fairy tales. Puss-in-Boots, The Sleeping Beauty, Little Red Riding Hood, and Jack the Giant-Killer are all introduced. The last paragraph gives the story away as a dream. The novelist seems to have been possessed of the use of her gifts of humour even in her dreams, and Jack the Giant-Killer is made to contribute to the comic element of the story. "'We are much disappointed,' said the French host, 'in finding that Monsieur is not accompanied by his countryman—le grand Jean d'Angleterre; . . .'

"'Le grand Jean d'Angleterre!'" Now, who was 'le grand Jean d'Angleterre?' John Bull? John Russell? John Bright?

"'Jean—Jean'—continued the gentleman, seeing my embarrassment. 'Ah, these terrible English names—'Jean de Géanquilleur!'

"I was as wise as ever. And yet the name struck me as familiar, but slightly disguised. I repeated it to myself. It was mighty like John the Giant-Killer; only his friends always call that worthy 'Jack.' I said the name aloud. 'Ah, that is it!' said he.

"'But why has he not accompanied you to our little *réunion* to-night?'

"I had been rather puzzled once or twice before, but this serious question added considerably to my perplexity. Jack the Giant-Killer had once, it is true, been rather an intimate friend of mine, as far as (printers') ink and paper can keep up a friendship, but I had not heard his name mentioned for years; and for aught I knew he lay enchanted with King Arthur's knights, who lie entranced, until the blast of the trumpets of four mighty kings shall call them to help at England's need." This is a reference to the well-known Cheshire tradition of the knights who are supposed to lie sleeping in the caves at Alderley Edge,

a Cheshire village, with which Mrs. Gaskell had many happy associations.

The greater part of the year of 1860 was given by the novelist to hard, patient work in planning *Sylvia's Lovers*, and her descriptive touches of Whitby, taken as they were from the actual places described, are among her best work.

In 1861 *The Grey Woman* first appeared as a serial in *All the Year Round*. It is a story suggested by her tours up the Rhine in 1858 and 1860. Part is founded on historical fact, which the novelist uses as the basis of her story. These holidays on the Continent and elsewhere were not entirely devoted to pleasure. Often whilst her daughters sketched the old castles and interesting bits of scenery, she was reading any historical books which she could get hold of from the local libraries or museums, and interviewing the older residents of the place.

For *The Grey Woman*, Mrs. Gaskell had gathered a large number of facts and sufficient information for a complete novel, and, as in many of her short stories, there seems to be a prodigal use of precious material, which probably no one regretted more than the novelist herself; but often in her serials she had to write for a given date, and consequently she seems frequently to hurry on events in order to get to a fixed point week by week. When she republished her stories in book form, she sometimes altered them and dovetailed them, forming a more complete whole. Occasionally she made use of a new title, as in the case of *The Crooked Branch*, which was previously known as *The Sin of the Father*.

Charles Dickens paid another visit to Manchester in the December of 1860, giving *David Copperfield* at one of his popular readings in the city. It was to Charles Dickens that the novelist was indebted for the

suggestion that she should write from actual experience of life. Like him, she found in her own life incidents and information which she utilised in her best work. Dickens never visited Manchester without calling at 84, Plymouth Grove, where he was always a welcome guest.

In the February of the following year Mrs. Gaskell went once more to France, taking her daughter Meta and Miss Isabel Thompson, who afterwards became Mrs. William Sidgwick. They visited Madame Mohl's hospitable home in Paris, and then toured from place to place, collecting information and adding to their knowledge of French life.

The novelist gives a detailed account of this holiday in one of her French papers, which she wrote for *Fraser's Magazine* in 1864. These articles on French life are culled from her diary, and form a chatty account of what she saw and heard. Her daughter Meta figures as May, and Miss Isabel Thompson is the Irene of these bright holiday sketches. It is said that these sketches were much appreciated when first they appeared in 1864, and although the facilities for travel have brought France nearer to England—so that French life is now almost as familiar as English —there is much that is interesting to-day in these delightful papers, for they describe French Society as it was fifty years ago.

Madame A——, as was the custom then in vogue, received her visitors in her bedroom. This led Mrs. Gaskell to question her hostess as to this practice: "Our conversation drifted along to the old French custom of receiving in bed. It was so highly correct, that the newly-made wife of the Duc de St. Simon went to bed after the early dinner of those days, in order to receive her wedding visits. The Duchesse de Maine, of the same date, used to have a bed in the

ballroom at Sceaux, and to lie (or half sit) there, watching the dancers. I asked if there was not some difference in dress between the day and the night occupation of the bed. But Madame A—— seemed to think there was very little. The custom was put an end to by the Revolution, but one or two great ladies preserved the habit until their death."

Later, Mrs. Gaskell gives a very minute account of life as she experienced it in a French flat, comparing it with a similar custom as she knew it in Edinburgh before her marriage, and, later, at Rome. All her arguments in this interesting paper are in favour of a flat, though if she had lived in one herself she could not have kept her cows, pigs, and poultry, of which she was so proud. These papers form a very good guide to French society in the early sixties, and they would probably be of some assistance to English tourists in France, for they describe the pleasures of life in a French flat:

"When we return from our party, or whatever it may be, we ring the bell, and the *concierge*, perhaps asleep in bed in his little cabinet, 'pulls the string and the latch flies up,' as in the days of Little Red Riding Hood; we come in, shut the great *porte-cochère*, open the ever unfastened door of the *conciergerie*, light our own particular bed-candles at the dim little lamp, pick out any letters, etc., belonging to us which may have come in by the late post and go quietly upstairs."

After an excursion for the day to St. Germains, Mrs. Gaskell, writing under date May 10th, 1862, says: "We were quite worn out with the ever-increasing noise of Paris. . . . So we determined to go off to Brittany for our few remaining days, having a sort of happy mixture of the ideas of sea, heath, rocks, ferns, and Madame de Sévigné in our heads.

. . . We left Paris about three o'clock and went past several stations, the names of which reminded us of Madame de Sévigné's time—Rambouillet, perhaps, the most of all."

The novelist takes her readers with her to the Hotel Sévigné, where Madame de Sévigné once lived, after she left Les Rochers. At this time, Mrs. Gaskell was busy collecting material for a *Life of Madame de Sévigné*, and she had long looked forward to a visit to the house once occupied by this talented French writer. "Our plan was to sketch first and then try to see the house." Evidently Mrs. Gaskell had kept her description for her *Life of Madame de Sévigné*, for she does not give it in her paper, but concludes :

"How pleasant the long, quiet morning was! . . . . Then we went and saw the house and the portraits, and passed out of the window into the garden—like all French gardens—with neglected grass, and stone fountains and cut yews, and cypresses and a profusion of lovely flowers, roses especially. We were all very sorry to come away."

The diary concludes May 14th, 1862 :

"We have decided to return to England to see the Exhibition. We are going by Fougères, Pont Orson, Mont St. Michel, Avranches, Caen, and Rouen, and by that time we shall have made an agreeable 'loop' of a little journey full of objects of interest."

Accordingly, Mrs. Gaskell and her party arrived in London early in May, where "we had the brightest, gayest time possible," said one of her daughters.

It was in this year that Mrs. Gaskell paid a visit to Thackeray at Kensington, where she impressed him with her personality, "talking to him in the big dining-room at Palace Green, looking up laughing,

inquiring, responding, gay, yet definite, such is the impression I have of her presence," says Thackeray's daughter.

After visiting the 1862 Exhibition, Mrs. Gaskell and her daughters started for Manchester, where they found the terrible Cotton Panic of 1862 devastating Lancashire. Thousands of mill-hands were out of employment. The supply of cotton had failed as a consequence of the American War, and the poverty in Manchester seemed likely to rival that of the "Hungry Forties." Mrs. Gaskell, who was feeling well and strong after her long holiday, threw herself with characteristic energy into the work of organising relief. She offered the largest room in her home for a sewing-class for a number of working women from the factories in Mr. Gaskell's own district, intending to pay them according to their family needs for rent and food, rather than in proportion to the work accomplished.

Before she had time to put her ideas into practice, a scheme for the relief of the whole of Manchester was organised by a committee of ladies, and they suggested the carrying out of Mrs. Gaskell's plans on a large scale by the establishment of large sewing schools, as they were called, for the working women in the different districts. Mrs. Gaskell joined the committee, working for seven or eight hours a day, buying material, cutting out garments, and helping to organise the different centres. So hard did she work, that her health gave way, and she broke down under the strain. Her daughters loyally supported their mother, but they confessed that the awful distress got on their nerves, and they had to check themselves from talking about the subject incessantly in their home.

There is a story told in Manchester which shows Mrs. Gaskell's splendid tact. At the special sewing

school to which she gave most of her time, there was a large number of rough working-class women, many of them Irish. They were difficult to control, and when a bell was rung for dismissal, they rushed out in a general stampede, which resulted in several accidents. The lady at the head of the sewing school got the assistance of a retired soldier to help to keep order at the door, but the poor fellow found the task beyond him, and retired after a few days' experience, saying he was afraid he would be losing one of his limbs. Much to the surprise of the ladies in charge, Mrs. Gaskell offered to take the old soldier's place, and she calmly took her stand at the door, offering her hand to each one as she bade them "good afternoon."

She always believed in the inherent good of every one, and in this case her confidence was not misplaced. The rough women passed quietly through the door, pleased to have an opportunity of shaking hands with the lady, though they were not aware that she was also the accomplished novelist.

Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell and their daughters earned the well-merited thanks of the poor workers in Ancoats and other slums of Manchester for the splendid work they did so quietly and unostentatiously during the Lancashire cotton panic of 1862. Mrs. Gaskell's heart was touched by the hardships which the little children had to endure in the distress, and in order to save the babies and invalids, she organised a cheap supply of good, pure milk in the poorer districts of Manchester. She also helped to provide free meals for the poor, and supervised the arrangements for the supply of nourishing and appetising food.

After her breakdown in health she went to Eastbourne, and it was probably there that she wrote *A Dark Night's Work*, which appeared in *All the Year*

Round, from January 24th to March 21st, in the following year. In addition, she only published one article, *Six Weeks at Heppenheim*, which appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine* in May, 1862, and a short preface for a translation of *Garibaldi at Caprera*, the proceeds arising from this English translation being used for the establishment of a girls' school at Turin. This was by the express wish of Garibaldi himself, who believed that the best method of raising the character of the people was by conferring on them the benefits of a wise system of female education. Mrs. Gaskell's preface was intended as a kind of English endorsement of the scheme, commending it to the British public.

At the beginning of the following year *A Dark Night's Work* was published, as we have seen, as a serial in *All the Year Round*, and Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. issued it in book form, with illustrations by Du Maurier, in the same year. This story takes Mrs. Gaskell's readers once more to Knutsford and its surroundings. It is remarkable how many subjects Mrs. Gaskell has got from that little country town, with its few aristocratic families and historical traditions. Her supply of material from this source appears almost inexhaustible, and yet to the ordinary observer, how little there was—a simple village, with a few worthy families, and the necessary doctor, lawyer, and squire. When at a loss for a story, her thoughts used to wander to Knutsford, and her last three stories are of her early home and its neighbouring villages, and these are amongst her best work.

A Dark Night's Work, *Cousin Phillis*, and *Wives and Daughters*, written between 1862 and 1865, all refer to the same district, and the most of the originals of the characters lived within a radius of five miles of Knutsford parish church. *A Dark Night's Work* is founded on a story told in Green's

History of Knutsford. He recorded the facts three years before Mrs. Gaskell worked them up into a story. Mr. Green's version deals with an attorney who, on his way home from Knutsford, called at a wayside tavern noted for its good ale. Here he mysteriously disappeared, and was never seen alive again after entering the fatal house. No trace of him could be found, nor could any suspicion be attached to any individual. Years passed by, and still nothing was heard of his fate, until a man who lived a life of good repute among his fellow townsmen confessed on his death-bed that the murdered attorney was buried in one of the sandpits on the heath. He related the circumstances connected with the murder, and admitted that he stabbed the man and buried the body, which was found in the spot that he indicated. Within a few hours of his confession, he died. Mrs. Gaskell would have heard this Knutsford story long before Mr. Green told it in his *History of Knutsford*, and in *A Dark Night's Work* the tale is practically that told by Green, with the single variation that the attorney dies, after he had left the village inn, as the result of a blow from the hand of his employer, in whose house the murder was committed. The murderer, with the assistance of his daughter and coachman, buried the body under a tree in the garden. It is a skilfully-woven tale, the house in the story where the murder took place being on the outskirts of Knutsford, which in this case appears under the name of Hamley. The George Inn, which figures in *Cranford* and *Ruth*, is again introduced into this story:

"In the opinion of all the shire, no society had more reason to consider itself select than that which met at every full-moon in the Hamley assembly-room, an excrescence built on to the principal inn in the town by the joint subscription of all the county-families.

Into those choice and mysterious precincts no town's person was ever allowed to enter; no professional man might set his foot therein; no infantry officer saw the interior of that ball or that card-room. The old original subscribers would fain have had a man prove his sixteen quarterings before he might make his bow to the queen of the night; but the old original founders of the Hamley assemblies were dropping off; minuets had vanished with them, country dances had died away, quadrilles were in high vogue—nay, one or two of the high magnates of—— shire were trying to introduce waltzing (as they had seen it in London, where it had come in with the visit of the Allied sovereigns), when Edward Wilkins made his *début* on these boards. He had been at many splendid assemblies abroad; but still the old ball-room attached to the George Inn in his native town was to him a place grander and more awful than the most magnificent saloons he had seen in Paris or Rome. He laughed at himself for this unreasonable feeling of awe; but there it was notwithstanding."

The description of the house where the murder was committed fits one of the old houses around Knutsford. The love story associated with this old home is a very simple one, but, as Mrs. Gaskell tells it, the narrative holds the reader's attention to the end. Ellinor Wilkins is a predecessor of Molly Gibson in *Wives and Daughters*, and her father, the Hamley attorney, belongs to the same type of character as Dr. Gibson, and has the same affection for his motherless daughter. Mr. Corbet, who comes to Hamley to read with the Vicar in order to prepare himself for Cambridge, falls in love with the attorney's pretty daughter. Shortly afterwards, occurs the accident which results in the death of the assistant-attorney from London, who had come to help Mr. Wilkins.

The strain produced by the secret burial of the body, and the concealment of the fact by the father, daughter, and coachman, is felt all the way through the story. The breaking off of the engagement between Ellinor and Mr. Corbet is a regrettable result of this secrecy.

After the death of the father, the daughter goes to live with her old governess at East Chester; and when she is on a visit to Rome, the novelist brings in the actual occurrence which she and her daughters, Marianne and Meta, experienced in the Spring of 1857, when, on the second night of the voyage from Marseilles to Civita Vecchia, the boilers of the ship burst, and the vessel had to put back to Marseilles. Mrs. Gaskell, in the story, reverses the journey, and the accident occurs when Ellinor Wilkins is returning from Civita Vecchia to Marseilles. The novelist evidently takes the *rôle* of Ellinor, and the description of the accident is probably taken from a letter sent by Mrs. Gaskell to her home circle in England:

"The vessel was just passing the rocky coast of Elba, and the sky was flushed with rosy light, that made the shadows on the island of the most exquisite purple. The sea still heaved with yesterday's storm, but the motion only added to the beauty of the sparkles and white foam that dimpled and curled on the blue waters. The air was delicious, after the closeness of the cabin, and Ellinor only wondered that more people were not on deck to enjoy it. One or two stragglers came up, and began pacing the deck. Dr. Livingstone came up before very long, but he seemed to have made a rule of not intruding himself on Ellinor, excepting when he could be of some use. After a few words of commonplace morning greeting, he, too, began to walk backwards and forwards, while Ellinor sat quietly watching the lovely island receding

fast from her view—a beautiful vision never to be seen again by her mortal eyes.

"Suddenly there was a shock and sound all over the vessel; her progress was stopped; and a rocking vibration was felt everywhere. The quarter-deck was filled with blasts of steam, which obscured everything. Sick people came rushing up out of their berths in strange undress; the steerage passengers—a motley and picturesque set of people, in many varieties of gay costume—took refuge on the quarter-deck, speaking loudly in all varieties of French and Italian *patois*. Ellinor stood up in silent, wondering dismay. Was the *Santa Lucia* going down on the great deep, and Dixon unaided in his peril? Dr. Livingstone was by her side in a moment. She could scarcely see him for the vapour, nor hear him for the roar of the escaping steam.

"'Do not be unnecessarily frightened,' he repeated, a little louder. 'Some accident has occurred to the engines. I will go and make instant enquiry, and come back as soon as I can. Trust to me!'

"He came back to where she sat trembling.

"'A part of the engine is broken, through the carelessness of those Neapolitan engineers; they say we must make for the nearest port—return to Civita, in fact.'

"'But Elba is not many miles away,' said Ellinor. 'If this steam were but away, you could see it still.'

"'And, if we were landed there, we might stay on the island for many days; no steamer touches there; but, if we return to Civita, we shall be in time for the Sunday boat.'"

This story was published in 1863, and two years afterwards Mrs. Gaskell had laid down her pen for ever. Those who knew her intimately were aware that she was suffering from heart disease, and at

times her condition caused them grave anxiety. For herself, Mrs. Gaskell had no fear. She never relaxed her efforts, but worked continuously as ever. When her pen was not busy, her brain was planning new stories. Manchester people, especially some of the Cross Street congregation, sometimes wondered that she took so many holidays, for often she was away for the greater part of the Spring and the Summer; but during these so-called holidays she was making notes and collecting material for her stories.

Mrs. Howitt tells in one of her letters, dated December 26th, that Mrs. Gaskell was staying in the South of England for her health, because Manchester did not suit her. As it was almost impossible for Mr. Gaskell to leave Manchester, to which he was very much attached, the only plan possible was for his wife to get to the South of England or on the Continent as often as possible. It was fortunate that she had daughters who could manage the household affairs in her absence. The girls adored their mother, and did everything to facilitate her visits to the South, one or two of them invariably accompanying her on these occasions.

The frequent heart attacks, which probably Mrs. Gaskell kept very much to herself, seemed to spur her on to do all she wished to accomplish. She had a dread of wasting her energy in vain regrets, and she used her self-control to the utmost in the work she undertook.

There is a reference in *A Dark Night's Work* to the great sorrow bearing on the family:

"The next two years passed over in much the same way—or a careless spectator might have thought so. I have heard people say, that if you look at a regiment advancing with steady step over a plain on a review-day, you can hardly tell that they are not

merely marking time on one spot of ground, unless you compare their position with some other object by which to mark their progress, so even is the repetition of the movement. And thus the sad events of the future life of this father and daughter were hardly perceived in their steady advance, and yet over the monotony and flat uniformity of their days, sorrow came marching down upon them like an armed man. Long before Mr. Wilkins had recognised its shape, it was approaching him in the distance—as, in fact, it is approaching all of us at this very time ; you, reader, I, writer, have each our great sorrow bearing down upon us. It may be yet beyond the dimmest point of our horizon ; but in the stillness of the night our hearts shrink at the sound of its coming footstep. Well it is for those who fall into the hands of the Lord rather than into the hands of men ; but worst of all is it for him who has hereafter to mingle the gall of remorse with the cup held out to him by his doom."

At times Mrs. Gaskell felt that her life was uncertain, but work seemed to be her solace.

The conclusion of *A Dark Night's Work* is in accordance with the novelist's kindly judgment ; and Ellinor, who was so true to the memory of her father, finds her place by the side of Mr. Livingstone, the Canon, who had loved her for eighteen years, and was always at hand when wanted. Dixon, the attorney's faithful servant, who is prepared to face death rather than betray the secret of his dead master's guilt, is remarkably well drawn. "The novelist has quickened life and never rendered it more turbid. She has purified it, and never arrested or slackened its flow by her homely stories," says an American critic.

Immediately after the publication of *Sylvia's Lovers*

in February, 1863, Mrs. Gaskell started for the Continent to recoup her fagged energies, and to get away from the story which had occupied her for so long a time. Once more France attracted her, and she made for Madame Mohl's home in Paris. She enters in her diary on February 16th, 1863:

"Again in Paris! and as I remember a young English girl saying with great delight, 'We need never be an evening at home.' But her visions were of balls; our possibilities are the very pleasant ones of being allowed to go in on certain evenings of the week to the houses of different friends, sure to find them at home, ready to welcome any who may come in. Thus, on Mondays, Madame de Circourt receives; Tuesdays, Madame ——; Wednesdays, Madame de M——; Thursdays, Monsieur G——; and so on. There is no preparation of entertainment; a few more lights, perhaps a Baba, or cake savouring strongly of rum, and a little more tea is provided. Everyone is welcome, and no one is expected. The visitors may come dressed just as they would be at home; or in full toilette, on their way to balls and other gaieties. They go without any formal farewell; whence, I suppose, our expression 'French leave.'"

Mrs. Gaskell learned much of Madame Récamier's life from Madame Mohl, with whom she had been acquainted for fourteen years, and in one of her articles on French life she writes of Madame Récamier as a model hostess: "A certain talent is required in the hostess, and this talent is not kindness of heart, or courtesy, or wit or cleverness, but that wonderful union of all those qualities with a dash of intuition besides, which we call tact. . . . Madame Récamier had it to perfection. Her wit or cleverness was of the passive or receptive order; she appreciated much and originated little. But she had the sixth sense,

which taught her when to speak and when to be silent. She drew out other people's powers by her judicious interest in what they said; she came in with sweet words before the shadow of a coming discord was perceived. It could not have been all art; it certainly was not all nature."

This tribute to Madame Récamier resembles that paid to Mrs. Gaskell by her old friend, Catherine Winkworth, in a letter written years before Mrs. Gaskell wrote of Madame Récamier. Another hostess whom the novelist was never tired of eulogising was Madame de Circourt, "so well known, so fondly loved, and so deeply respected." "Madame de Circourt was a Russian by birth, and possessed that gift for languages which is almost a national possession. This was the immediate means of her obtaining the strong regard and steady friendship of so many distinguished men and women of different countries. You will find her mentioned as a dear and valued friend in several memoirs of the great men of our time. I have heard an observant Englishman, well qualified to speak, say she was the cleverest woman he ever knew. And I have also heard one, who is a saint for goodness, speak of Madame de Circourt's piety, and benevolence, and tender kindness as unequalled among any women she had ever known."

On a later occasion, in speaking of this good woman's courtesy and charm of manner, Mrs. Gaskell says: "I think it is Dekker who speaks of our Saviour as the first true gentleman that ever lived. We may choose to be shocked at the freedom of expression used by the old dramatist, but is it not true? . . . I could not help interrupting the course of my diary to pay this tribute to Madame de Circourt's memory"; and then the novelist quotes again from her diary:

" At the end of February, 1863, many were startled with a sudden pang of grief. ' Have you heard ? Madame de Circourt is dead ! ' ' Dead !—why, we were at the house not a week ago ! ' ' And I had a note from her only two days ago about a poor woman,' etc. And then the cry was : ' Oh, her poor husband ! who has lived but for her, who has watched over her so constantly ! ' "

Copying from her diary, Mrs. Gaskell gives an account in *Frazer's Magazine* of another phase of French life :

" Paris,
" *March 2nd*, 1863.

" Staying here in a French family, I get glimpses of life for which I am not prepared by any previous reading of French romances, or even by former visits to Paris, when I remained in an hotel frequented by English, and close to the street which seems to belong almost exclusively to them. The prevalent English idea of French society is that it is very brilliant, thoughtless, and dissipated ; that family life and domestic affections are almost unknown, and that the sense of religion is confined to mere formalities. Now, I will give you two glimpses which I have had ; one into the more serious side of Protestant, the other into the under-current of Roman Catholic life. The friend with whom I am staying belongs to a Dizaine, that is to say, she is one of ten Protestant ladies, who group themselves into this number in order to meet together at regular intervals of time, and bring before each other's consideration any cases of distress they may have met with. There are numbers of these Dizaines in Paris ; and now as to what I saw of the working of this plan. One of their principles is to give as little money as possible in the shape of ' raw

material,' but to husband their resources, so as to provide employment by small outlays of capital in such cases as they find on enquiry to prove deserving. Thus women of very moderate incomes find it perfectly agreeable to belong to the same Dizaine as the richest lady in the Faubourg St. Germain. But what all are expected to render is personal service of some kind; and in these services people of various degrees of health and strength can join; the invalid who cannot walk far, or even she who is principally confined to the sofa, can think and plan and write letters; the strong can walk, and use bodily exertion. They try to raise the condition of one or two families at a time —to raise their condition into self-supporting independence. . . .

"Of course, these ladies, being human, have their foibles and faults. Their meetings are apt to become gossipy, and they require the firm handling of some superior woman to keep them to the subject and business in hand. Occasional bickerings as to the best way of managing a case, or as to the case most deserving of immediate assistance, will occur; and may be blamed or ridiculed by those who choose rather to see blemishes in execution than to feel righteousness of design. The worst that can be said is, that Dizaines (like all ladies' committees I ever knew) are the better for having one or two men amongst them. And some of them at least are most happy and fortunate in being able to refer for counsel and advice to M. Jules Simon, whose deep study of the condition of the workwoman in France, and the best remedies to be applied to her besetting evils—whose general, wise, and loving knowledge of the life of the labouring classes—empower him to judge wisely on the various cases submitted to him."

Again, under the same date, Mrs. Gaskell writes:

"We are talking of leaving Paris, and going leisurely on to Rome. M. de Montalembert was here last night, and wrote me down a little *détour* which he said we could easily make, rejoining the railroad at Dijon."

"*March 5th* (1863),
"AVIGNON.

"After all, we were not able to follow out M. de Montalembert's instructions, but I shall keep his paper (written in English), as the places he desired us to visit sound full of interest, and would make a very pleasant week's excursion from Paris at some future time.

"Provide yourself with Ed. Joanne's *Guide du Voyageur*. Est-et-Mur.

"By the Lyons railway to Auxerre (a beautiful city with splendid churches).

"At Auxerre take the diligence (very bad) to Avallon, a very pretty place, with fine churches. At Avallon hire a vehicle of some sort to Vezelay, only three leagues off; the most splendid Romanesque church in Europe; and to Chastellux, a fine old castle belonging to the family of that name, from the Crusade of 1147. Returning to Avallon, there is a very bad coach to Sémur, another very pretty place, with a delightful church; seven or eight leagues off. From Sémur by omnibus to Montbard, or Les Launes, which are both railroad stations. Stop at Dijon, a most interesting city, and be sure you see the museum. . . . We could not manage to go by Avallon and Dijon, and so we came straight on here, and are spending a few days in this charming inn; the *mistral* howling and whistling without, till we get the idea that the great leafless acacia close to the windows of our *salon* has been convulsed into its present twisted form by the agony it must have

suffered in its youth from the cruel sharpness of the wind. But, inside, we are in a lofty *salon*, looking into the picturesque inn-yard, sheltered by a folding screen from the knife-like draught of the door ; a fire heaped up with blazing logs, resting on brass and-irons ; skins of wild beasts making the floor soft and warm for our feet ; old military plans, and bird's-eye views of Avignon, as it was two hundred years ago, hanging upon the walls, which are covered with an Indian paper ; Eugénie de Guérin to read ; and we do not care for the *mistral*, and are well content to be in our present quarters for a few days."

"*March* 12*th* (1863).

" I suppose our landlady thought she would keep us prudent and patient indoors, until we receive the telegram from Marseilles announcing that it is safe for the boats to Civita Vecchia to start—hitherto they have been delayed by this horrid *mistral*—for she has brought us in a good number of books, most of them topographical, but one or two relating to the legends or history of the district. We are very content to be in the house to-day ; the wind is blowing worse than ever ; Irene has a bad pain in her side [this is probably meant for her daughter Julia], which we suppose must be a local complaint ; for, after trying to cure it by mustard plaisters, she sent our maid out at last to get a blister of a particular size, but without naming what part required the application ; and the druggist immediately said, ' Ah, for the side ; it will last while the *mistral* lasts ; or till she leaves Avignon ! ' "

"*March* 16*th* (1863).

" Though the *mistral* has but little abated, we went across to Ville-Neuve this morning. Irene was not well enough to go ; so Mary [Meta Gaskell] and I, attended by Demetrius, our courier, made the

expedition. Demetrius has no fancy for excursions off the common route, and only went with us because he thought himself bound in duty to humour our eccentricity. The suspension-bridge over the Rhone was shaking and trembling with the wind as we crossed it ; and our struggle in that long exposure was so exhausting, that when we were once in the comparative tranquillity of the other side, we stood still and looked about us for some time before going on. The colour of the landscape on each side of the rushing river was a warm grey ; rocks, soil, buildings, all the same. There was but little vegetation to be seen ; a few olive trees, of a moonlight green, grew in sheltered places. We thought it must be like the aspect of Palestine, from Stanley's account ; and Demetrius, who had been several times in the Holy Land, confirmed this notion of ours ; but then he was rather apt to confirm all our notions, providing they did not occasion him extra trouble. After we had crossed the bridge, we turned to the right, and went along a steep, rocky road to the summit of the hill, above Ville-Neuve."

"*March* 17*th* (1863).

"A telegram from Marseilles. A boat starts to-day for Civita Vecchia."

The remainder of this Continental tour of 1863 was spent in Rome. Mrs. Gaskell had a twofold object in visiting France and Italy, besides that of getting a holiday. She was always anxious to improve her French and Italian, and, still more so, her daughters' knowledge of these two languages. Both Mrs. Gaskell and her daughters were very good linguists, and spoke French, German, and Italian fluently. Mrs. Gaskell's favourite languages were French and Italian, whilst Mr. Gaskell was more partial to German.

In the Autumn of 1863, Mrs. Gaskell was busy

preparing for the wedding of her third daughter, Florence Elizabeth, who was married to Mr. Charles Crompton, Q.C., on September 8th, at Upper Brook Street Chapel, Manchester. The bride's father officiated at the ceremony.

On December 23rd, 1863, Thackeray died. He was a year younger than Mrs. Gaskell, and though she never became intimate with him as with Dickens, she yet esteemed him very highly, and was much grieved when she heard of his sudden death. She wrote a tender, motherly letter to his daughters, asking them to come to Plymouth Grove after their father's funeral. This visit did not take place, but later on the girls joined Mrs. Gaskell and two of her daughters at Brighton. It is said that during this visit one of Thackeray's daughters observed to Mrs. Gaskell: "My father does not wish his life to be written"; and Mrs. Gaskell, turning to her own daughters, expressed the same wish regarding her own life, desiring them not to supply information for this purpose. This wish her daughters have kept most loyally, regarding it, as they say, as a death-bed promise. Biographical sketches, however, have from time to time appeared with or without the sanction of the family. Mrs. Gaskell has now become a classic, and is being recognised more and more as one of the most distinguished novelists of the nineteenth century, concerning whose life and work succeeding generations are naturally interested. Lady Ritchie, Thackeray's daughter, herself wrote a short sketch of her friend in the *Cornhill Magazine*, relating therein a conversation about Mrs. Gaskell between M—— and N——. The M—— and N—— seem to betray themselves as Miss Meta Gaskell and Lady Ritchie, warm friends ever since their first meeting in 1862, a year before Thackeray's death. The same sympathetic pen has

contributed a biographical introduction to that edition of *Cranford*, which has been further graced by Mr. Hugh Thomson's delightful drawings.

In the Christmas number of *All the Year Round* for 1863 is a story written by Mrs. Gaskell, which was probably gleaned during one of her Brighton visits. All Mrs. Gaskell's Christmas stories are somewhat eirie, dealing with either ghosts or mysterious murders. This story is included in Charles Dickens' introduction to *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*, under the title of *How the First Floor went to Crowley Castle.* It is prefaced by a remark, taken probably from a letter from Mrs. Gaskell to Dickens: "I have come back to London, Major, possessed by a family story that I have picked up in the country."

The story relates to a legend connected with an old castle near Brighton: "Last year I visited the ruins of his (Sir Mark Crowley's) great old Norman castle, and loitered in the village near, where I heard some of the particulars of the following tale from old inhabitants who had heard them from their fathers—no further back.

"We drove from the little sea-bathing place in Sussex to see the massive ruins of Crowley Castle," writes the novelist; and then she tells a tale of a century before, bringing in her knowledge of Paris and French servants. The story is well told, and deals with two young girls, their love affairs, and their match-making mother—Mrs. Hawtrey, the Vicar's widow. Very cleverly does the novelist bring out the contrast between Bessy and Theresa, who seem to be drawn from the same models as Molly and Cynthia in *Wives and Daughters*. The French maid-servant, Victorine, contrasts strongly with her English servants so often introduced into Mrs. Gaskell's stories. The tale ends with a confession from the

French maid of the murder of Bessy, which alters everything, and causes the death of the innocent Theresa.

Mrs. Gaskell has been accused of being too miscellaneous in her writings, but it must be remembered that she was a journalist as well as a novelist, and her journalistic career depended on variety. She learnt so much and gathered her material in so many directions, that it was impossible for her to keep within any limited bounds without abandoning half her store. She could only use what she knew by seeking constantly new ways of expressing herself, and the more she sought, the more the boundaries had to be extended, and the wider became her horizon. Her career affords an excellent illustration of the value of minute observation at all times and in all places.

It was during the year 1863 that a curious little sketch, called *A Cage at Cranford*, was published in *All the Year Round*. It is certainly too extravagant in the demands it makes upon the readers, and the fact that the crinoline opens at both ends ought to have saved it from being thought suitable for a parrot's cage. It is just a little comedy which Mrs. Gaskell probably prepared hurriedly, sending it to Dickens, who, partial to anything that savoured of *Cranford*, at once printed it in *All the Year Round*. Mrs. Gaskell did not like this little sketch after it was published, and for this reason, by her daughters' desire, it was not included in the Knutsford edition of her works. It was published ten years after the *Cranford* sketches, and tells of many of the old friends of that story. In this little tale the narrator confesses that she "generally felt like a girl at Cranford, where everybody was so much older than I was."

Another short paper, *An Italian Institution*, tells of the Camorra and a system of blackmail in vogue in

Italy during the reign of the Bourbons. The article was printed in *All the Year Round* in March, 1863. It is an informing paper, and is written in Mrs. Gaskell's lucid style. She tells how the Camorra has undergone four distinct changes. Under the reign of Ferdinand II it acted as the secret police ; under his son Francis it became the ally of the Liberals. During the time of the revolution it discharged the function of a police, and afterwards, under Victor Emmanuel, it declared itself to be persecuted, and worked for the return of the Bourbons. Mrs. Gaskell's paper was the result of what she had read, as well as of what she had heard and experienced.

Mrs. Gaskell's last two stories, *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters*, have often been referred to as her best work. Both are founded on facts in her own life or in the lives of her friends, and it is noticeable that these experiences always produced stories which were characterised by simplicity and reality.

Dr. Furnivall relates an interesting conversation he had with Mr. George Smith, the publisher, whilst walking home after spending an evening with Ruskin at Denmark Hill in the early sixties. Mr. Smith was anxious that the recently established *Cornhill Magazine* should appeal to a wider range of readers. He stated that he had considered the matter in the light of business principles, and had doubled the ordinary pay both in the editor's salary and the contributors' fees, and was prepared to give the best price for a good serial story. Dr. Furnivall replied that he knew Kingsley, Tom Hughes, and " the charming Mrs. Gaskell " very well, and asked what amount he was prepared to give for a good novel. Mr. Smith expressed his willingness to pay two thousand pounds to one or each of these writers for a seven years' copyright of a novel which should first appear in the *Cornhill Magazine.*

Dr. Furnivall expressed his surprise at the large amount offered, though he thinks that to many present-day readers the sum may not appear so excessive. He wrote to the three authors reporting the offer. Kingsley and Hughes thanked him in reply, and promised to talk the matter over with their friend, Alexander Macmillan.

Mrs. Gaskell wished at this time to purchase a house in the country, and she closed with Mr. Smith's offer, and wrote *Wives and Daughters*, after a preliminary, *Cousin Phillis*, in 1863–1864. The story ran through the *Cornhill Magazine* from August, 1864, to January, 1866, and with the sum paid, Mrs. Gaskell bought a house at Holybourne, near Alton, in Hampshire. In book form, *Wives and Daughters* was issued in eight successive editions, including a German edition in 1866 and a French translation in 1868. Its only appearance since 1889 has been in complete editions of Mrs. Gaskell's works published by Smith, Elder & Co. in 1894, 1897, and in the Knutsford edition in 1906. It is, therefore, more than twenty years since the work was issued as a separate book.[1]

Why Mrs. Gaskell wrote *Cousin Phillis* first is not clear, unless she had made up her mind to tell the life-story of one of the daughters at the farm at Sandlebridge for the two thousand pounds' story, and when she had got to a certain point decided to close it for various reasons, for the readers are left with a desire to know what became of Cousin Phillis after her illness and visit to Paul Manning's parents. A heroine so fascinating as Phillis deserved a better fate than to be left so abruptly. But the conclusion is more natural than was the case with Ellinor Wilkins in *A Dark Night's Work*. She, like Phillis, is deserted

[1] Since the above was written there has appeared an edition in the *World's Classics*, with an introduction by Mr. Clement Shorter.

by her old lover, but marries another, though it is not shown that she was attached to him, but rather that she made the best of her opportunity. As a short story, *Cousin Phillis* is complete in itself, though Mrs. Gaskell could have given the sequel. There is no doubt that Mrs. Gaskell adopted a higher standard when she began to write for the *Cornhill Magazine* regularly. Nothing that she had done for *Household Words* or *All the Year Round* was equal to *Cousin Phillis*. As a short story, it has received more praise than most, and it is certainly Mrs. Gaskell's best finished story. "A diamond without a flaw," to quote one of her ablest critics.

Critics have spoken of *Wives and Daughters* as the fruit of Mrs. Gaskell's old age, but it is well to remember that the novelist was only fifty-three when she began the novel. In many ways, *Wives and Daughters* is related to *Cranford*. It tells of the same places and of many of the friends of the *Cranford* characters, and, like *Cranford*, was written chapter by chapter without much previous planning. The novelist "planned this story as she wrote," said one of her daughters. In the previous chapters on Church House and Tatton Park the characters of this tale have already been discussed. All the descriptive scenes in this last novel are of Knutsford and its surroundings, and it shows how well Mrs. Gaskell remembered all the places near her early home, for most of the book was written on the Continent, much of it at Pontresina, where she was staying with her daughters, her son-in-law, Mr. Charles Crompton, Q.C., and her nephew, Mr. Thurstan Holland, who was engaged to her eldest daughter Marianne. She wrote some of the concluding chapters in Madame Mohl's home in Paris, standing often by the mantel-piece, putting down her fast-flowing thoughts. The final

chapters were written whilst staying at Dieppe in a quiet hotel.

It is by far the largest novel Mrs. Gaskell ever wrote, and covers nearly a thousand pages of closely-written manuscript. She feared that it would be much too long, but Madame Mohl, who was greatly interested in her story, begged her not to bring it to a sudden close. "You must not split on that rock," she said. It is related that Mrs. Gaskell once thought of making another story of the subsequent career of Molly Gibson and Roger Hamley. Readers, however, are left with a feeling that all will be well with faithful Molly Gibson and the clever, sensible Roger Hamley, the prototype of Charles Darwin.

It was whilst waiting for a reply to a letter addressed to an authority on biological matters as to the kind of appointment Roger Hamley would be likely to fill when he returned from his expedition, that the novelist laid down her pen for ever. The last lines written by Mrs. Gaskell were very significant, for she was getting weary of her long story, and was longing for rest: "And now cover me up close and let me go to sleep, and dream about my dear Cynthia and my new shawl! . . ."

It is said that Mr. George Smith, on hearing of her death, grieved much for the loss of so good a friend and so gifted a contributor. He rode over to Mr. Frederick Greenwood's home, and, placing the last chapter of *Wives and Daughters* in his hands, asked him to finish it as well as he could. Mr. Greenwood consulted Mrs. Gaskell's daughters as to the probable ending of the story as their mother had planned it. The fact that the daughters knew the sequel shows how well Mrs. Gaskell had kept up her early plan of talking over her stories with the members of her family. Mr. Greenwood added about five pages,

under the heading: "Concluding Remarks [By the Editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*]." :

"Here the story is broken off, and it can never be finished. What promised to be the crowning work of a life is a memorial of death. A few days longer, and it would have been a triumphal column, crowned with a capital of festal leaves and flowers; now it is another sort of column—one of those sad white pillars which stand broken in the churchyard.

"But if the work is not quite complete, little remains to be added to it, and that little has been distinctly reflected into our minds. We know that Roger Hamley will marry Molly, and that is what we are most concerned about. Indeed, there was little else to tell."

Of Roger Hamley, Mr. Greenwood writes:

"Therefore this young gentleman, so self-reliant and so lucid in scientific matters, found it difficult, after all, to tell Molly how much he hoped she loved him; and might have blundered if he had not thought of beginning by showing her the flower that was plucked from the nosegay. How charmingly that scene would have been drawn, had Mrs. Gaskell lived to depict it, we can only imagine; that it *would* have been charming—especially in what Molly did, and looked, and said—we know. . . ."

Mr. Greenwood gives the summing-up of the story very briefly:

"Roger and Molly are married; and if one of them is happier than the other, it is Molly. Her husband has no need to draw upon the little fortune which is to go to poor Osborne's boy, for he becomes professor at some great scientific institution, and wins his way in the world handsomely. The Squire is almost as happy in this marriage as his son. If anyone suffers for it, it is Mr. Gibson. But he takes a partner, so

as to get a chance of running up to London to stay with Molly for a few days now and then, and 'to get a little rest from Mrs. Gibson.' Of what was to happen to Cynthia after her marriage the author was not heard to say much; and, indeed, it does not seem that anything needs to be added. One little anecdote, however, was told of her by Mrs. Gaskell, which is very characteristic. One day, when Cynthia and her husband were on a visit to Hollingford, Mr. Henderson learned for the first time, through an innocent, casual remark of Mr. Gibson's, that the famous traveller, Roger Hamley, was known to the family. Cynthia had never happened to mention it. How well that little incident, too, would have been described!"

Mr. Greenwood, in his eulogy of Mrs. Gaskell, says: "All minds are tinctured more or less with the 'muddy vesture,' in which they are contained; but few minds ever shewed less of base earth than Mrs. Gaskell's. . . . For her, the end of life was not descent amongst the clods of the valleys, but ascent into the purer air of the heaven-aspiring hills." It is not possible to agree with Mr. Greenwood in speaking of Mrs. Gaskell—in her three last novels, *Sylvia's Lovers*, *Cousin Phillis*, and *Wives and Daughters*—"being born again." Nothing that she wrote in those five years was much superior to the earlier parts of *North and South*, and *Sylvia's Lovers*, though beautifully written, ought not to be included in the same category as *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters*. Its characters are not so real and convincing, and, moreover, the heroine in *Sylvia's Lovers* does not live "a calm and wholesome life," but gives way to selfishness and passion, which cause her husband to leave his home and die a wreck.

The last four years of Mrs. Gaskell's life were

certainly marked by more careful writing, a circumstance that may be attributed to her change of publishers. Fine as had been her work for her first publishers, she now no doubt made a new start, determined to win fresh laurels. Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co. had treated her handsomely in connection with the *Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and she exerted herself to serve them well, and wrote some of her best stories, notably *Cousin Phillis* and *Wives and Daughters*. Mr. Greenwood concludes: "It is unnecessary to demonstrate to those who know what is and what is not true literature that Mrs. Gaskell was gifted with some of the choicest faculties bestowed upon mankind; that these grew into greater strength and ripened into greater beauty in the decline of her days; and that she has gifted us with some of the truest, purest works of fiction in the language. And she was herself what her works show her to have been—a wise, good woman."

CHAPTER XX

LAST DAYS AT MANCHESTER AND HOLYBOURNE

(1865)

THE Novelist's Intermittent Illness—Her Last Holiday in Paris—Return to Manchester—Purchases " The Lawn," Holybourne—Mrs. Gaskell and Mrs. Lynn Lynton—Appreciation by Edna Lyall—The Village of Holybourne—Description of " The Lawn "—Death of the Novelist—News conveyed to Mr. Gaskell at Manchester—A Quiet Funeral at Knutsford—Obituary Notices—Funeral Sermon.

THE last year of Mrs. Gaskell's life was one of intermittent and growing weakness, though she tried to hide it from her family and friends. In the Spring she once more visited Madame Mohl. A visit to Madame Mohl, indeed, had come to be an annual affair, for the company of this cheery though eccentric friend always did her good. Although she did not get to know Madame Mohl until 1854, they were from the very first mutually attracted, and became the greatest of friends. For the first fortnight of her visit to the Rue du Bac, Mrs. Gaskell, who had found the voyage very trying, was confined to the house. Quietness and rest were what she needed most.

On her return to Manchester in April, she was unable to see any friends for some time, and absolute quiet was necessary. This was difficult to secure in such a place as Manchester, for when at home there were so many calls on her strength and time, calls which she invariably tried to meet with a brave heart and smiling countenance. To refuse to help in any good work was always painful to her. She loved to be generous alike of time, strength, and

means, especially in Manchester amongst the poorer members of her husband's church. In earlier days she was known to take several of her delicate Sunday School scholars to her own home, sometimes for weeks together, for rest and change, giving them all the benefits of good food and plenty of fresh air. Change of scene, formerly her best tonic, had not done much for her during her last holiday, and she longed for the rest of a country home. There is no doubt that in these closing years Mrs. Gaskell attempted too much. She was getting worn out, but, as in the case of Ian Maclaren, her friends found it difficult to believe that she was ill, for she was writing and planning, "at work and at play," to the very last. If she was to keep pace with her literary work, it was absolutely necessary that she should have a quiet country home of her own, where she could be free from outside influences, and be able to concentrate on her work. Wherever she went, her note-book and manuscript went with her, as well as her diary, which was always a storehouse of information from which she could weave a story.

In the June of 1865 she was considering whether to buy a house known as "The Lawn," at Holybourne. This delightful country had long been familiar to her, and she delighted in the beauties of the New Forest, though in many ways she was not anxious to break away from her associations with Manchester. Here, in this quiet country hamlet, Mrs. Gaskell had planned to have her own pony carriage, in order to enjoy the drives around to such places as Selborne, the birth-place of Gilbert White, and to Chawton, associated with Jane Austen, and to the many other historical spots within a short distance of Holybourne.

Looking back on Mrs. Gaskell's strenuous life, one inclines to believe that she might have lived longer

if she had been content to do less work and had lived more quietly ; but she delighted in a large house and many servants, in entertaining her many friends, and, above all, in Continental travel. Her standard of comfort was expensive, but her tastes were always refined. Speaking of her taste with regard to people, she says : " I call mine a very comprehensive taste. I like all people whose occupations have to do with the land, and I like soldiers and sailors and the three learned professions." In her husband, her sailor brother, her favourite uncle, and her son-in-law many of these callings were represented.

For some reason she did not take her husband into her confidence, which seems strange, as he was always her counsellor. It is said that she meant to present the house at Holybourne to him as a Christmas gift, but Mr. Gaskell was so firmly attached to Manchester, that he would have had very little use for it. He rarely took a holiday, his recreation being his work, and, unlike his wife, he seldom felt the need of change.

The house was to be Mr. Gaskell's so far as title deeds were concerned, and the novelist and one or two of her daughters intended to make it their home for the greater part of the year. There is a touching passage in one of the novels which reveals the writer's mind when tired and perplexed, as she was at this time :

" ' I take changes in all I see as a matter of course. The instability of all human things is familiar to me. . . . I begin to understand now what heaven must be—and, oh ! the grandeur and repose of the words —The same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Everlasting ! From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. That sky above me looks as though it could not change, and yet it will. I am so tired—so tired of being whirled on through all these phases of my

life, in which nothing abides by me, no creature, no place; it is like the circle in which the victims of earthly passion eddy continually. I am in the mood in which women of another religion take the veil. I seek heavenly steadfastness in earthly monotony. If I were a Roman Catholic and could deaden my heart, stun it with some great blow, I might become a nun. But I should pine after my kind; no, not my kind, for love for my species could never fill my heart to the utter exclusion of love for individuals. Perhaps it ought to be so, perhaps not; I cannot decide to-night.' "

So says Margaret Hale.

Concerning her heroine, the novelist says: "Wearily she went to bed, wearily she arose in four or five hours' time. But with the morning came hope and a brighter view of things." This was often the case with Mrs. Gaskell. Weary and depressed at night, she would wake up refreshed and prepared for her daily tasks. Her thoughts are well depicted in the subsequent passage: "After all it is right," said she, hearing the voices of children at play while she was dressing. "If the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt, if that is not Irish. Looking out of myself, and my own painful sense of change, the progress of all around me is right and necessary. I must not think so much of how circumstances affect me myself, but how they affect others, if I wish to have a right judgment, or a hopeful, trustful heart."

Mrs. Gaskell shows in her writings the source of her strength. She was a truly religious woman, and her religion stood the test of her daily conduct towards others; she never hesitated to say what she was convinced was true, and she never deserted a friend or lost an opportunity of defending either a friend or a foe.

In the *Life of Mrs. Lynn Lynton* is a letter dated January 17th, 1897, in which she tells the story of Messrs. Hurst & Blackett, asking her to contribute a biographical sketch of one of the Victorian novelists for a Queen's Jubilee volume. After stating that she set aside George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Craik and Harriet Martineau, she says that if she complies with the request of the publishers, it will be to write about Mrs. Gaskell. Curiously enough, she disclaims any personal knowledge of both Mrs. Gaskell and her works, not having read any of her novels since she was a young woman, but she goes on to say: "My impression of her is sweet, and she seemed to me such a dear and not as affected as either George Eliot or Mrs. Craik." She then gives the real reason for selecting Mrs. Gaskell: "When I was quite young, and was being acrimoniously discussed at Harriet Martineau's, she upped and defended me, though she knew nothing of me."

This volume of appreciations which Mrs. Lynn Lynton refers to was published under the title *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign*. Mrs. Lynn Lynton, however, was not invited to discuss Mrs. Gaskell. That congenial task fell to Edna Lyall, who always declared Mrs. Gaskell to be her favourite author. She produced a delightful appreciation, doing honour to both her subject and herself: "Of all the novelists of Queen Victoria's reign, there is not one to whom I turn with such a sense of love and gratitude as to Mrs. Gaskell," wrote Edna Lyall.

To the devotees of Mrs. Gaskell, Holybourne will ever be associated with her sudden death, which took place on Sunday afternoon, November 12th, 1865, the novelist being fifty-five years of age.

Holybourne, near Alton, in Hampshire, is just such an old-world place as would appeal to Mrs. Gaskell.

The little hamlet is situated about a mile-and-a-half from Alton Station. The river Bourne, which gives the place its name, rises in the churchyard and flows through the parish, after uniting its waters with the small river Wey. The village was one of the places of call for pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury. The old church has a fine lych gate and a handsome carved pulpit. Residents in Holybourne still remember seeing Mrs. Gaskell at the service in this old church shortly before her death.

This locality was selected by Mrs. Gaskell because it was considered to be extremely healthy. About 300 feet above the sea-level, it is prettily situated in the valley of the Wey. All around lie undulating chalk hills, from which can be seen very fine views of the surrounding country. The water from the springs is noted for its purity, and few healthier spots can be found in the South of England, the death-rate being one of the lowest in the whole country. It is convenient for London, being only 46 miles by rail, which would be a point in its favour, as Mrs. Gaskell had many friends and relatives in the Metropolis.

This pretty hamlet, with its old-fashioned thatched cottages, answers minutely to the place described by the novelist in *North and South* as Helstone, the home of Margaret Hale. The readers of the story are first introduced to it after the wedding of Margaret's cousin from Harley Street :

" 'Tell me about Helstone. You have never described it to me,' says Henry Lennox. 'Is Helstone a village or a town ?' 'Oh ! only a hamlet. I don't think I could call it a village at all. There is the church and a few houses near it on the green —cottages rather—with roses growing all over them. It really sounds like a village in a tale, rather than in real life.' 'And so it is,' replied Margaret eagerly.

'All the other places in England that I have seen, seem so hard and prosaic looking. Helstone is like a village in a poem—in one of Tennyson's poems. But I won't try and describe it any more. You would only laugh at me if I told you what I think of it—what it really is.' "

Evidently Mrs. Gaskell had known the village long before she took possession of "The Lawn," for *North and South* was written ten years before she came to live there. The house is far from being a cottage. It is a large, detached house, standing at some little distance from the main road, well shaded with thick fir trees, and with a beautiful garden and a little brook —a tributary of the Wey—meandering through the grounds. The stream is crossed by a pretty wooden bridge, connecting the lawn and flower-garden with the orchard beyond. No more peaceful place could have been found for an author's residence. Here and there on the lawn are rustic seats under the old shady trees and in restful alcoves.

It is a house with a history, which Mrs. Gaskell probably knew, for in *North and South* she tells of Margaret and Mr. Bell visiting Helstone for the last time, and driving up to the Lennard Arms, half-farm-house, half-inn, standing a little apart from the road. The house faced the village green, and in front of it stood a memorial lime tree, benched all round, in some hidden recesses of whose leafy wealth hung the grim escutcheon of the Lennards. This is where, in earlier days, the May-pole dances were held on the village green.

Before the advent of the railway to Alton, "The Lawn" was an old hostelry, part farm and part inn, known as The White Hart. It was noted in the days of the stage-coach as a good stopping place for man and beast. Some fifty years before Mrs. Gaskell

purchased it, it was converted into a private house, and the license was transferred to a new building some few hundred yards distant, still known as The White Hart. At one time there was a public footpath through the grounds of "The Lawn." The story of the means used to divert this footpath is interesting: The gentleman who owned the house some years before Mrs. Gaskell invited all the villagers to a luncheon in the village schoolroom, and after they had had their fill of the good things provided, the host, with consummate tact, asked if they would grant him a favour instead of giving him a formal vote of thanks. This they agreed to, and the favour he asked was that he might have their permission to close the public path through his grounds, so that he could have a private garden. This was agreed to, and so succeeding generations have to travel a greater distance to get to the woods.

The house is long and narrow, and has been built at two different periods. There is a long, glass-covered porch, forming a conservatory, which is the main entrance. The oak-panelled hall extends the whole length of the building, from the front door to the door opening on to the lawn. On the ground floor, to the right, is a large drawing-room, with French windows on two sides, commanding a beautiful view of the grounds; also a smoke-room and dining-room. On the left are a billiard-room, a large kitchen, with rough, oak beams, and an ancient bacon-rack and a scullery with two large, old-fashioned "coppers." There are ten bedrooms, some leading from one room to another, but there is only one staircase. In some ways the house resembles the old Heath-side home at Knutsford, where Mrs. Gaskell spent her childhood.

There are good stables and a coach-house, and a

THE LAWN, HOLYBOURNE

kitchen garden sufficiently large to supply vegetables for a large family. Mrs. Gaskell had taken possession of the house in October, staying with three of her daughters and her son-in-law, superintending the alterations which she found necessary. The drinking water was obtained from a deep well, but Mrs. Gaskell arranged to have it carried through pipes into the house. In fact, she was modernising the house and trying to make it as convenient as 84, Plymouth Grove. The alterations were nearly finished, and her last Sunday was a quiet, happy day for the novelist, who was enjoying her new home and feeling particularly bright and well. With her three daughters and son-in-law she was having tea in the drawing-room on this Sunday afternoon of November 12th, and one of her daughters was about to pass a cup of tea to her mother, when she noticed her head drooping, and in less time than it takes to tell she was gone "without a moment's warning," heart failure being the cause. She died as she wished, in harness, in full possession of all her faculties; and yet how sad for those left behind was this awfully sudden death!

"Mama's last days had been full of loving thought and tender help for others," wrote one of Mrs. Gaskell's daughters.

Madame Mohl wrote after Mrs. Gaskell's death: "If you had known what a heart she had! But no one did. One who gave so much had a right to expect a good deal in return, and she got it and enjoyed it. She was a singularly happy person, and her happiness expressed itself in an inexhaustible flow of high spirits. She looked happy. . . . And what a charm there is in the mere sight of a happy human face, amidst the suffering, discontented ones that meet us on all sides."

Mr. Gaskell, who was preaching in the chapel at

Cross Street, Manchester, on that very Sunday evening, did not get the news of his wife's death until Monday afternoon. The sad duty devolved on Mr. Crompton. He started for Manchester on the Monday morning, and on reaching Plymouth Grove found that Mr. Gaskell was attending a meeting of Unitarian ministers at Altrincham. A telegram was sent to him asking him to return home. It is said that he seemed to divine what had happened, for he asked the Rev. S. A. Steinthal, then the minister at Platt Chapel, Manchester, and afterwards Mr. Gaskell's colleague, to go with him to his home. There he received the sad intelligence, for which he seemed in a measure to be prepared. Mr. Gaskell journeyed to Holybourne with his son-in-law, under circumstances very different from those his wife had planned.

There are living in Holybourne those who remember the stricken household and the sad funeral procession which left " The Lawn " on the morning of Thursday, November 16th, 1865. A death masque of the face was taken soon after Mrs. Gaskell died, and for a long time it hung in the drawing-room at Plymouth Grove.

Short as Mrs. Gaskell's stay at Holybourne had been, she had already endeared herself to her servants, some of whom were natives of the village. Although she died away from her Lancashire home, she was taken to Knutsford to be buried, in the spot she had herself chosen, within sight of the old Unitarian Chapel at the foot of Adam's Hill. The funeral was a very simple one, in accordance with the wishes of the family, and was strictly private. The mourners numbered only five : the Rev. W. Gaskell, Mr. S. Gaskell, Mr. R. Gaskell, Mr. C. Crompton, and Mr. T. Holland. The funeral service was read by the Rev. H. Green, M.A., the minister at Brook Street Chapel, Knutsford. At

the chapel, however, a number of prominent Manchester men had assembled to witness the ceremony, and to pay a tribute of respect to the memory of the deceased lady.

Besides the many friends in Manchester, London, and other parts of England, who mourned the loss of Mrs. Gaskell, there were numerous French friends, the chief of whom was Madame Mohl, who described " my dear Mrs. Gaskell " as " the best friend she ever had in England, and a singularly happy person."

All the Manchester newspapers printed obituary notices, and all deplored the death of one who had brought honour to the city. The Unitarian magazine, *The Enquirer*, of which Mr. Gaskell was joint editor, had a very sympathetic reference. Evidently the account was published before Mr. Gaskell saw it, for it contains several errors. The *Pall Mall Gazette* for November 15th, 1865, also contained a very appreciative article on Mrs. Gaskell, concluding with the words : " This is not the time for criticism, which the genius of Mrs. Gaskell might meet without fear. Her books will be studied in years to come, both for their merits of style and incident, and as a faithful picture of good English life and sound English manners, beyond the accidents of class or fashion. She will be herself remembered with affectionate regret by all who knew her, as a most genial and delightful lady, who gave light and comfort to her home, and pleasure to every society she entered."

The *Unitarian Herald* for November 18th, 1865, lays stress on her good work in Manchester : " At one time she visited much among the poor in Manchester, to whom her delicate sympathy made her a welcome guest, and she was always interested in any plans which seemed to her really adapted to improve their condition. . . . The ready sympathy and the

pleasant, kindly humour which characterised all she wrote gained for her friends in all ranks, and the news of her death will come with a sad surprise into many homes where her writings have been only the introduction to a loving regard for the unknown writer." The concluding remarks of the *Unitarian Herald* are very significant: "It was but last Monday afternoon [the day after her death] that we were reading the first few chapters of *Mary Barton* to a group of poor women, who meet every week for a few hours at one of our mission stations. We little thought, as we noted their appreciation of its sketches of a life so familiar to them, how still the hand of its writer already was. We stopped at the beginning of the third chapter, the heading of which comes back to us now with a touching appropriateness:

> "But when the morn came dim and sad,
> And chill with early showers,
> Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
> Another morn than ours."

It is noticeable that the Manchester papers refer to the regrettable Branwell Brontë controversy, and also to the discussion over the *Cranford* sketches as they appeared in *Household Words*: "She had drawn portraits of some living personages too accurately." All agreed that though she had travelled much abroad, her inspiration was always to be found in English life and character.

It was left to the *Examiner* to give the best and most beautiful tribute: "Reaching far beyond her own family circle, far beyond that wider circle of friends who loved and valued her so truly, is the grief which Mrs. Gaskell's death brings with it. In the very fulness of her powers, with her imagination quite undiminished, and her heart fresh and warm as ever,

she has been taken from us. The world of letters has lost a colleague who pressed on among the very foremost in its ranks, and we have all lost one who united to rarest literary ability all the best and highest gifts of a very noble woman. That tender pathos, which could sink so deep—that gentle humour which could soar so lightly—that delicate perception which nothing could escape, that wide sympathy which ranged so far, those sweet moralities which rang so true, it is, indeed, hard and sad to feel that these must be silent for us henceforth for ever. Let us be grateful, however, that we have still those writings of hers which England will not willingly let die, and that she has given us no less an example of conscientious work and careful pains by which we all alike may profit. For Mrs. Gaskell had not only genius of a high order, but she had also the true feeling of the artist, that grows impatient at whatever is unfinished or imperfect. Whether describing with touching skill the charities of poor to poor, or painting with an art which Miss Austen might have envied, the daily round of common life, or merely telling in her graphic way some wild or simple tale, whatever the work, she did it with all her power, sparing nothing, scarcely sparing herself enough, if only the work were well and completely done. This is not the time to speak of Mrs. Gaskell as she was to those who knew her best, but they may at least be reminded how many are sorrowing in their sorrow and grieving for their loss. By the death of Mrs. Gaskell many distinguished men of letters, not only in this country but in France and in America, will feel that there has passed away one whose kindly heart and gracious presence had a charm about them which no one could resist. And there are others whose grief will be deeper still. How many young authors, struggling upward, did she assist with her

ready sympathy and friendly counsel! How many operatives, in the bitterness of the cotton famine, found the authoress of *Mary Barton* as ready to help them by her active presence as she had once tried to help them by her pen! And now she has left us, and a dark cloud has, indeed, fallen upon that happy home, which was so beautiful in its simple hospitality, and which, as equally perhaps no other home in Lancashire, fostered the purest love of books and art, and of every liberal and cultivated taste."

Few have left so noble a record of work done either as a woman or as a writer. A funeral sermon preached in Cross Street Chapel on November 17th, 1865, by the Rev. James Drummond, B.A., on "The Holiness of Sorrow," was very impressive, and many not connected with the chapel crowded to hear of one whom they had learnt to love. The text of the sermon was from the Psalms xxxix. verse 9: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it." Mr. Drummond gave the novelist's favourite quotation from Tennyson:

> "Oh, yet we trust that somehow good
> Will be the final goal of ill."

In the course of his sermon, the preacher remarked: "Her own wish was gratified. She experienced no declining faculties, no wearing illness. Her life was joyous to the last, and for her such a departure is blessed." The sermon was afterwards published and dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, whose genius has endeared her to the public, and whose constant, effective, and thoughtful kindness will be ever held in loving remembrance by those who shared her friendship or needed her help.

CHAPTER XXI

GASKELL MEMORIALS

MANCHESTER.—Memorial Tablet in Cross Street Chapel—Bust in the Victoria University—Collection of her Works in Moss Side Library—Scholarship at Manchester University—Recreation Ground—Memorial Hall—Nursing Institute—The Gaskell Shrine.

KNUTSFORD.—Memorial Stone in the Unitarian Graveyard—The Gaskell Tower—Streets named in honour of Mrs Gaskell.

"No woman who ever wrote was ever so self-effaced as Mrs. Gaskell," says one of her critics; but though she has been dead for nearly forty-five years, no complete biography of her has been published. Appreciations, however, and short biographical sketches outnumber those of many other women writers. Manchester and Knutsford have recognised the author of *Mary Barton* and *Cranford*, and in days to come London will have the Richmond portrait in the National Portrait Gallery and a memorial tablet on the house in which Mrs. Gaskell was born.

In the Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, in a corner to the right of the pulpit, is a memorial tablet to Mrs. Gaskell, side by side with another to the memory of her husband, placed there on his death, nearly twenty years after that of his wife. The tablet commemorating Mrs. Gaskell is of stone, set in marble, the inscription being composed by Mr. Gaskell. The letters are becoming somewhat obliterated, whilst those on Mr. Gaskell's marble memorial tablet are much clearer.

Mrs. Gaskell's memorial in Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, reads:

IN MEMORY OF

+

ELIZABETH CLEGHORN GASKELL, WIFE OF THE REV. WILLIAM GASKELL, M.A., ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THIS CHAPEL. WISELY HONOURED FOR HER GENIUS AND THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT WAS EXERCISED, ENDEARED BY HER RARE GRACES OF MIND AND HEART TO ALL BY WHOM SHE WAS KNOWN, SHE FULFILLED THE DUTIES OF A WIFE AND A MOTHER WITH A TENDERNESS AND FIDELITY WHICH SECURED FOR HER UNDYING LOVE, AND SO LIVED IN CHRISTIAN FAITH AND HOPE, THAT DEATH, WHICH CAME WITHOUT A MOMENT'S WARNING, HAD FOR HER NO STING.

BORN SEP. 29TH, 1810 + DIED NOV. 12TH, 1865.

Erected by the Congregation in token of their respect and regard.

Manchester's second memorial is the marble bust in the Christie Library of the Manchester University. This is a faithful replica of the bust which was sculptured in Edinburgh in 1832. Placed on a polished granite pedestal, it shows the beautiful pose of the head looking up, with something akin to Madame Mohl's description of the novelist, where she says: "Mrs. Gaskell always seemed to be scenting clever *mots*." It was executed by Hamo Thorneycroft, and presented to the Library by Miss Gaskell and Miss Julia Gaskell. It is the only bust of a woman which is included in the group of Manchester worthies. By its side is a bust of John Dalton, who represents Science, whilst Mrs. Gaskell represents Literature. Another Gaskell Memorial takes the form of a scholarship. In the year 1878, which was the jubilee of Mr. Gaskell's ministry at Cross Street Chapel, a sum of two thousand two hundred pounds was raised as a testimonial. By Mr. Gaskell's express wish, the greater part of this—one thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds—was set aside to provide a scholarship, tenable at Owens College, in connection with the

MRS. GASKELL

Unitarian Home Mission Board. It was called " The Gaskell Scholarship." The financial results of Mrs. Gaskell's literary efforts made it a matter of no difficulty for him to suggest this employment of the money intended for his personal use.

Few men in Manchester have deserved so well as William Gaskell to be counted as one of Manchester's worthies. He is remembered as one of the brightest ornaments of the Unitarian ministry.

Another Manchester memorial to the Gaskells is the Gaskell Hall. Visitors to Plymouth Grove are greeted by the words " Gaskell Hall " on a large lamp over the doorway of a building at the entrance to Plymouth Grove from the Stockport side. This building, which was erected by the Unitarians of the district, is used as a Sunday School. It owed much to Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell's kindly interest, though it was erected some years after Mrs. Gaskell's death. Yet the money which the Gaskell family contributed so generously was derived in a great measure from the proceeds of the books which the novelist left behind. There is a tablet to Mr. Gaskell's memory inside the building. As one of the oldest worshippers remarked : " He was a grand man as well as a good preacher."

The memorial which would have pleased Mrs. Gaskell best is the collection of her works at the Moss Side Public Library, Greenheys, built on the very spot which she has described at the beginning of *Mary Barton*. The collection is an excellent one, comprising as it does the more important English editions with some foreign issues. From it one gathers that *Mary Barton* and *Cranford* were the most popular, the former being represented by twelve, the latter by fifteen editions. One of the most devoted admirers of the novelist is Dr. W. E. A. Axon, who, together with the enthusiastic librarian

and bibliographer, Mr. J. Albert Green, is mainly responsible for this valuable memorial. Mrs. Gaskell's daughters have also helped to make the collection as complete as possible.

Reference has already been made to the Gaskell Recreation Ground, which is an indication of the love for children which has always been shown by Mrs. Gaskell's daughters. The lamented death of Miss Julia Gaskell in October, 1908, was a severe blow to her remaining sister at Plymouth Grove, who since her sister's death has been occupied in erecting a memorial which will keep green not only Miss Julia Gaskell's memory, but also that of her mother.

Miss Gaskell has purchased two houses not very far from 84 Plymouth Grove, and has had them converted into a nursing-home for men and women of the artisan class. Every modern appliance has been introduced, and the rooms have been furnished with true artistic instinct—chairs, cushions, carpets, all harmonising in colour, while everything that will conduce to the comfort of the patient has been obtained. This nursing-home is not free, but the fees are such as come within the means of the class for whom it is intended. Miss Gaskell finds a solace in managing this memorial nursing-home, knowing how well it represents the wishes and feelings of her parents and sisters.

Mr. Gaskell's portrait, painted in 1872 by W. Percy, hangs in the Memorial Hall, Manchester, and the plate presented to him in 1878 in commemoration of his ministerial services during fifty years at Cross Street Chapel, is bequeathed, subject to certain conditions, to the trustees of the Memorial Hall. A marble bust of Mr. Gaskell by J. W. Swinnerton was placed in 1878 in the Reading Room of the Portico Library,

Manchester, of which he had been a member for fifty years and chairman of the committee for thirty years.

In speaking of the Gaskell Memorials, we must not overlook 84, Plymouth Grove. Here were written parts of all Mrs. Gaskell's books except *Mary Barton*. The house is at once artistic and homely, and contains many of the relics of her who was once its chief ornament and attraction. In addition to the Richmond portrait, and a collection of all the first editions of the novelist's works, there are numerous signed books from other authors and cherished Chippendale furniture chosen by Mrs. Gaskell when prices were not so prohibitive as now.

The drawing-room contains the Edinburgh bust of Mrs. Gaskell on a pedestal in one corner, and the Richmond portrait hangs above the corner of the mantelpiece where she used to sit. Her presence seems still to pervade the room in which she often read her manuscripts before they were sent to the publishers. In the dining-room, on a side table, is a beautiful inlaid mother-of-pearl inkstand which Mrs. Gaskell always used when writing her books. On the mantelpiece are two splendid specimens of black basalt Wedgwood vases, given by Josiah Wedgwood to Mrs. Gaskell's grandfather as a wedding present. The oil paintings were such as Mr. Ruskin admired when he was a frequent visitor there. One is a fine oil painting of Mr. Gaskell by Miss Fox. The painting of the "Holy Family and St. Catherine," by Palma Vecchio, is bequeathed to the city Art Gallery. Two small drawings by Charlotte Brontë also adorn the walls of the drawing-room at Plymouth Grove. Everything here has a history, and the room is crowded with memories of most of the great writers and thinkers of the Mid-Victorian era.

The old Unitarian burial-ground at the foot of

Adam's Hill, Knutsford, said to be the oldest Unitarian burial-ground in England, contains the grave of Mrs. Gaskell, at the head of which is a plain stone cross, with the simple inscription at the base :

ELIZABETH CLEGHORN GASKELL,
Born September 29, 1810 ;
Died November 12, 1865.
And of WILLIAM GASKELL,
Born July 24, 1805 ;
Died June 11, 1884.

On the right-hand side of this same base is the name of the youngest daughter :

JULIA BRADFORD GASKELL,
Born Sept. 3, 1846 ;
Died Oct. 23, 1908.

The chapel dates back to 1689. It was here that the last funeral service was held preparatory to the simple committal service at the grave. Mrs. Gaskell has described the old chapel and the graveyard very minutely and beautifully in *Ruth*.

Near Mrs. Gaskell's grave are the family graves of the Colthursts, Swintons, Hollands, and Mrs. Lumb, including many who were the originals of the characters in *Cranford* and other Knutsford stories. Mrs. Gaskell was known in her own family circle as Lily Gaskell, and her grave is planted with lilies of the valley, and at each corner are dwarf white rose trees, emblematic of the blameless lives led by her husband and herself.

It is to this shrine that Gaskell pilgrims first wend their way. The parish church where Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell were married, and where may be seen the marriage certificate, is the next place of interest.

Until 1907, Knutsford had no special memorial to the author of *Cranford*, except a bronze medallion

MRS. GASKELL'S GRAVE

over the entrance to the Post Office. In that year a resident of the town, Mr. R. H. Watt, a great admirer of Mrs. Gaskell's books, built a tower to her memory in King Street, and the bronze medallion, which was also his gift, was transferred from the Post Office to one of the recesses in the tower.

The tower was designed by Mr. Watt. It is ten feet square at the base and rises to a height of seventy feet. It has the appearance of an old turreted English tower, and is fitted with three bells, which were cast at Annecy in Savoy. The bells are rung on special occasions, and are particularly sweet in tone. Each bell is inscribed with one of the three mottoes: "Come unto Me," "Fight the good fight," and "Till He come." The bronze medallion is by Cavaliere Achille D'Orsi, Professor of the Fine Arts in the Royal Academy at Naples. The bas-relief is from a photograph, taken at the request of the hostess, by an Edinburgh professional photographer, in the home of one of Mrs. Gaskell's friends. This was one of the last photographs taken of Mrs. Gaskell, and several of her Sunday School scholars received copies. Mrs. Gaskell is here represented sitting with an open book on her knee, a lace mantilla arranged on her hair, and a beautiful shawl falling from her shoulders. The bronze bas-relief does not show the softness of the mouth and the gentleness of the face so well as the photograph, and the face gives one the impression of a younger woman. Mrs. Gaskell was only fifty-three when the photograph was taken, but in the original portrait she appears much older.

The medallion is placed in a niche on the inside of the tower, rather than where one would expect to find it, in the recess which faces the street. It is hoped that some day this recess will hold a bas-relief taken from the Richmond portrait, which is a more

pleasing likeness of Mrs. Gaskell. At present that niche is occupied by a stone bust copied from Hamo Thorneycroft's bust of Mrs. Gaskell in the Victoria University.

One who often met the novelist in Manchester has described her as of medium height, very graceful in her carriage, and with a manner of dignified humility. Her hair was brown, and her shining eyes hazel, with sometimes a look of blue in them, which probably accounts for Madame Mohl describing them as blue, as also does Mrs. Bridell-Fox. For her eyes and mouth were always ready for a smile, and her beauty was best seen when she was engaged in conversation.

At the base of the figure in the bronze bas-relief is a copy of *Cranford* and a laurel wreath, with a quill pen through the ribbon, which ties the wreath. Below, in the stone work, is inscribed: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job xiii. 15). "Words dear to Mrs. Gaskell, often quoted by her, and amongst the last she uttered." Above the medallion are the names of some of the most popular of her works, viz., *Mary Barton*, *Cranford*, *Ruth*, *The Heart of John Middleton*, *The Sexton's Hero*, *North and South*, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, *The Half-Brothers*, *The Crooked Branch*, *Sylvia's Lovers*, *Cousin Phillis*, and *Wives and Daughters*. On the adjacent stone-work are several texts from the Bible, and also quotations from Carlyle and Gladstone, both of whom were highly esteemed by Mrs. Gaskell.

The opening ceremony in connection with the Gaskell Tower was performed on Saturday afternoon, March 23rd, 1907. Mr. Ernest Leycester, of Mobberley Old Hall, presided, and among those present were the Vice-Principal of Victoria University, Dr. Hopkinson, K.C., LL.D., who opened the tower; a grandson of Mrs. Gaskell; and Prof. Herford, D.Lit. Mrs.

THE GASKELL TOWER, KNUTSFORD

THE GASKELL MEDALLION

Gaskell's daughters were abroad, and consequently unable to be present. The chairman, in his opening speech, referred to Knutsford's reputation for serenity and absence of that feverish activity which marked other towns. While to some people that might mean a want of enterprise, yet he could not help feeling that an atmosphere of that kind must have helped to form those generous feelings and kindly instincts which were so very noticeable in all Mrs. Gaskell's works.

The Vice-Chancellor of the Manchester University spoke as a representative of a university mainly interested in literature and scientific study, and also as a sincere and devoted admirer of Mrs. Gaskell—an admirer not only of her literary work, but of the personal influence which she left behind her in Manchester and its district. He referred to the novelist's intense sympathy with life in all its conditions, and to her absolute rightness on all questions of moral judgment and of conduct in life. These characteristics were illustrated in the hero of *North and South*, in the character of Molly in *Wives and Daughters*, and in that of Bradshaw in *Ruth*. A touch of humour also cast a mellow light over the whole of Mrs. Gaskell's works.

Professor Herford referred to the close association of his family with that of the Gaskells, and pointed out how Mrs. Gaskell brought together the two aspects of English life—agricultural and industrial—practically, socially, and economically wide apart. She came to Manchester steeped in the aroma of the country. Although her picture of Manchester was not a study of city life which at all points could be called consummate, yet it came at a time when knowledge of this kind was extremely defective, and she was one amongst a small group of novelists who brought it home to the rest of the world. In

common they helped to manifest the state of industrial England to the rest of the country, and in some sense to Western Europe. He pointed out how differently Dickens and Thackeray would have treated the characters in *Cranford*, and said that, though Mrs. Gaskell was powerfully influenced by Dickens, yet she preserved what was best in her own bent, and showed the strength of her character by refusing to be led away by the influence and style of the popular writers of her day.

Mr. George Milner, President of the Manchester Literary Society, observed that it was nearly sixty years since he had first read *Mary Barton*, and he well remembered his feelings on learning that so beautiful a story was written by a lady in his own town. Too often a novelist commenced to work with the object of seeing how many of the commandments he or she could break. That was not the formula on which Mrs. Gaskell founded her works. Her novels were like herself. She was not only a woman of genius, a woman with a fine sense of humour, a woman with a powerful sense of observation, but also a good woman, a perfect woman, and a noble woman. Her books were clean, sweet, and wholesome, and the more they could do to encourage novels of that kind in their libraries, the better they would be.

Adjoining the Gaskell Tower is the King's Coffee Tavern, and in another part of Knutsford is a Cranford Café.

In addition to these Gaskell Memorials, two roads are named in honour of the novelist—Gaskell Avenue and Cranford Avenue. It is impossible to visit this little provincial town without being reminded of Mrs. Gaskell. The shops sell her portraits, and picture postcards of her early home and that of her uncle,

Dr. Holland, and Miss Matty's tea-shop. All these buildings are pointed out, as well as the Hon. Mrs. Jamieson's, the old Vicarage, and Tatton Park.

It has been said that Knutsford has helped to make Mrs. Gaskell's reputation as a writer, but if that is so, she has repaid the debt by immortalising the "dear little town." Pilgrims from different countries, especially America, visit Knutsford as one of the great literary shrines of England, and they admit that they are the better able to understand the novelist's Knutsford stories after seeing her early home and the church in which she was married, and, last of all, the simple grave in the old Unitarian burial-ground, where sleeps one of the most kind and winsome women-writers that this or any other country has ever known.

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